

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT HESPER," "HONEST DAVIE,"
&c., &c.

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LIEUTENANT BARNABAS.

CHAPTER I.

A ROGUE AND A FOOL.

A KNIGHT-ERRANT and his Squire rode along the Green Lanes, Hornsey. The Knight had a face deeply pitted with small-pox, a short nose, a square jaw, a straight mouth, high cheekbones, large ears, and eyes so close together that they were of necessity unusually small. He wore a mangy beaver hat with a military cockade, a bob-wig, a long coat with a cape, and a pair of riding-boots. There had been a hard frost for four days, nevertheless coat and boots were plentifully bespattered with dry mud; and their dilapidation was such that they looked better with mud upon them than without.

He had the facial expression of an old man—a cunning old man, who has seen all that there is to be seen of the worst side of life; but he sat in the saddle like a young man, and whistled an Irish air with lively turns in a jaunty and youthful style.

He whistled, not for want of thought, but because his reflections were of a speculative, agreeable sort.

He was a knight, not in the old chivalric sense, but by reason that his life was devoted to adventure. He was not in the Green Lanes to redress the wrongs of suffering virtue, to help the weak, to relieve the oppressed; far from it. He had no sympathy with virtue; if he were lucky enough to meet with an unprotected lady he would pick her pocket, and if anything were to be got out of the weak and the oppressed, he would get it.

The squire was a man of quite a different kind; a stout young fellow of eighteen or twenty, with hair of an honest red, and a face turned out of Nature's simplest mould—a face broad and expansive, with no undercut, and which one might

model pretty easily by making a few indentations on the surface of a round Dutch cheese; he wore a long livery coat, sound boots, and a hat worth, say, about forty of his master's. The horse he bestrode was an excellent animal, whereas the knight's was as sorry a flea-bitten grey as ever shambled along the road, and habitually carried his head down in dejection, as if looking with sorrow upon the abnormal proportions of his knees.

The squire did not whistle; indeed he looked as miserable as if he were already on the road to Tyburn, and occasionally he opened his mouth to let a sigh escape. Beyond the fact that he had accepted service under the knight, there was no point of resemblance between him and the ancient squires. He had no reverence for his master, except such as arose from fear, and he had no taste for the profession he had adopted. The experience of twenty-four hours had completely changed the colour of his views, and he heartily wished that he had never been born. He trotted along about fifty yards behind his master—a distance he would fain have increased but that the knight occasionally turned in his saddle to see how he got on, and constantly kept one hand under his cloak on his pistol holster.

They had passed Wood Green, and the grey tower of Hornsey Church could be seen above the red-brown branches of the intervening trees, when the squire drew up to his master, and spoke.

"Here be another 'pike, master," he said.

"You may go in front and pay."

"Please, your worship, I can't."

"What, disobedient already! Can't pay—how's this?"

"It's beca'se I haven't any money, for I spent the last of the crown-piece you gave me for myself to pay for your honour's bread and cheese and ale at the 'Jolly Butchers'; and so being, my money's all gone and I haven't any left."

"Hum! Here, take this shilling, pay the toll and keep the change."

"It's something to serve a generous master," said the squire to himself, as he trotted forward to the toll-gate; "that makes six shillings he's given me for myself to-day; if I had not to spend it I should get rich quickly at this rate."

"Is there ever a good inn along this road, where a gentleman can put up for the night?" asked the knight of the toll-keeper.

The toll-keeper was a heavy-eyed, phlegmatic man: he looked at the knight from head to foot, keeping his hands in

the pockets of his short apron, and turning over his money before he answered.

"There's a house good enough for you about a mile further on. 'The Black Boy,' West Green—keep to your left," he said.

The knight dug his heels viciously in the ribs of his horse, and made a sign to his squire, who stood by the gate waiting to take his place in his master's rear, to come to his side.

"We are getting near London, and I don't know the inns hereabouts, so you will have to be careful," said he.

"Yes, your worship."

"In the first place, you must drop that habit of addressing me as your worship. I have told you my name a dozen times, Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe."

"Lieutenant is such a long name to remember; I could think of captain, if it's all the same to you."

"Captain won't do. Every rascal on the road calls himself captain now. I don't mind your calling me 'your honour.'"

"I can recollect that, because Justice Thornton is always called your honour, and I can think of nothing but the bench and magistrates since I stole this horse."

"Haven't I told you that you didn't steal the horse? The horse was given you when you entered Admiral Talbot's service, and so in leaving it you were justified in taking the horse with you. That's plain, ain't it?"

"It would be right enough if everyone looked at the thing as generously as your honour; but you see, all folks haven't got the same way of giving and taking, and if Master Blake the steward caught sight of me, I wager he'd have me hanged for not thinking as he does."

"Well, my lad, just to ease your mind, we'll change horses at once. You can ride my mare with a light heart, for you may be certain no one will accuse you of having stolen her. It's as good as giving you ten guineas, it is," he said, as he dismounted and handed the rein over to his servant, "I've had as much offered for her again and again."

"That makes ten guineas and six shillings in one day," said the squire to himself; "why that's more than some servants gets in a year."

"I wonder I didn't think of that before," thought Lieutenant Barnabas. "He looks more like my servant on the old mare, and there's less chance of his giving me the slip. I could run him down in five minutes on this horse." Turning to his servant, he surveyed him with satisfaction, and then said: "And now about your name."

"Tobias Slink, your honour. Toby for short."

"Tobias won't do. Toby is too familiar. Slink—well, there's a sneaking sort of sound about that, but Slink must do. Now, Slink, if any one at the inn we're going to asks questions about me, you must say I am Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe, late of the Royal Blues; that I sold out upon coming into my present estate, which is situated in Ireland—Crewe Castle, County Cork. No, you'd better say Munster, that's not so well known—that I think of settling in England, and am looking about for a suitable seat."

"Your honour had better write that down, for I shall never remember it all. I was always back'ard in learning."

"On second thoughts, it would be advisable to give an evasive answer."

"What's that, your honour!"

"You can give indirect replies—and intimate that I am a nobleman wishing to travel *incog*."

"*Incog*. Is that in Ireland too, your honour?"

"No, fool! Look here; if anyone says to you, 'Who's your master?' you can answer, 'He's a nobleman travelling in disguise, and I can tell you no more than that.' Now do you understand that?"

"Oh, if it's only telling lies, I understand well enough."

"Very well. Now fall back, for I see the sign-board of the inn."

CHAPTER II.

AT THE "BLACK BOY."

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS CREWE trotted into the stableyard of the "Black Boy," followed by his servant, and having seen his newly acquired horse well stabled, and given instructions to Slink relative to the feed, he cocked his dilapidated beaver rakishly over one eye, and marched into the sanded passage of the inn, smacking his leg with his riding-whip, and looking about him with an assumption of arrogant authority, calculated, as he thought, to inspire respect.

"Your best room, madam, if you please, and what can I have for dinner?" he asked, still smacking his boot, and looking at the landlady fiercely from under the corner of his beaver.

The hostess, a fat widow, with a healthy face and short ringlets projecting from the front of her cap, carefully set her

glasses on her nose, and then looked at her interrogator critically before responding. It was annoying to be examined in this manner, but Lieutenant Barnabas was accustomed to it. Every one looked at him thus before replying to his first questions.

"Ah!" she said, taking off her glasses and putting them in her pocket. "The best room for you is the parlour. And as for dinner, there's no butcher's meat in the house, so you must make shift with eggs and bacon, if you choose to stop here."

"It would seem that you are not in the habit of seeing gentlemen at your house, madam."

"Oh, we see as many of your kind as we want, thank you, Sir," replied the hostess, tartly.

Without replying, the Lieutenant swaggered into the parlour. There he stirred the fire, piled more coals on the back, drew a Windsor chair well in front, seated himself, stuck his feet on the hobs, and then having with some difficulty determined which was the top and which was the bottom of a newspaper, pretended to be deeply engrossed in its contents when the hostess came in to lay the cloth.

"Will your companion dine with you?" she asked.

"My servant will dine in the kitchen; and I will trouble you to bring candles, and light a fire in your best bedroom."

"Are you going to stay all night? London is only five miles off."

"It pleases me to stay here, madam," replied Lieutenant Barnabas, turning his chair to give his hostess the full benefit of his frown. He refolded his paper, still looking at her, then returned to a deep study of the news, blessedly unconscious that the paper had got upside down.

"Hum!" murmured the hostess as she left the room. "Four o'clock, and bright weather—a strange time for a gentleman keeping a servant to put up at a small village inn so near London."

The old hostler was breaking the ice in the horse-trough in front of the house, she opened the half-door and beckoned him.

"Billy, is the stable closed?" she asked.

"No, marm. Young chap's a-grooming the hosses down."

"You go round there at once, and when the young man's done, lock the door and bring me the key; and don't you let those horses be taken out until I tell you the bill's paid."

These words coming to the capacious ears of the studious Lieutenant, he snatched his wig off and dashed it on the floor with an oath—"not loud, but deep."

Slink groomed his horses, and forgot his sorrows in the pleasure of his occupation. The stolen horse he got away from as quickly as possible—it wanted little grooming, and despite his master's assurances, he felt uneasy every time he touched the beast; but the horse that had been presented to him required more attention.

"It'll take a sight of brushing to make you look worth ten guineas," he murmured, and then he hissed as grooms do, and rubbed the wretched nag with all his strength, until nothing more could be done to improve appearances. Afterwards he washed himself in a bucket of water, reduced his shock of hair to smoothness by means of a wet mane-comb, and betook himself to the kitchen, where he sat by the fire-side in his shirt sleeves, and gave himself up to silent meditation. The kitchen-maid, who was cooking the eggs and bacon, did not disturb him—she was deaf and busy; so he sat there with his hands on his knees looking into the fire, where he conjured up the saucy face of the girl who had won his heart by her kindness, and then driven him away from her by cruelty.

To say that he frequently heaved a sigh would be less correct than to say that a sigh frequently heaved him, for on these occasions his whole frame expanded, his body rose, the gusty sigh came from his parted lips, and then he subsided into his normal condition.

"What's the matter, young man—are you hungry?" asked the cook, her attention at length attracted by these signs of distress.

Slink nodded; the natural cravings of nature were not yet removed by love.

"Well, you can draw up your chair to the table and begin. Your master's served, and this is for you. There's a mug of beer, and if you want more you can go up to the bar and ask for it. I'm going up to light a fire in your master's bedroom."

Slink cut himself a huge slice of bread and attacked the food with avidity, and did not pause until he had wiped the dish clean with the last crust of his half-quartern loaf; then he turned again to the fire, taking with him his brown mug of ale, and resumed his melancholy contemplations, sighing and drinking in fitful alternation, until the beer was all gone, when he set aside the empty mug, rested his arm against the chimney-piece and his face upon that, and gave vent to his sorrow in copious tears. He was weeping thus when the kitchen-maid returned.

"Haven't you had enough to eat?" she asked, in a tone of sympathy.

"It isn't the victuals, it's my heart," sobbed Slink.

The words were indistinct, and she was deaf; but she divined the cause of his wretchedness accurately enough. For what woman needs more explanation than a man carries in his face, as to the state of his heart. Love is the study of her life, and she detects at a glance the types of its votaries, as a naturalist knows by a single bone the physical aspect of the creature that possessed it.

"Never mind, young man!" said she. "It comes to all of us, cooks and grooms, just as it comes to lords and ladies, to fall in love, and to laugh, and then weep. Dry your eyes, lad, and run up-stairs, your master has sent for you."

Slink ran up-stairs, rubbing his eyes with his sleeve, and, touching his forelock to the hostess, entered the parlour.

Lieutenant Barnabas had resumed his place before the fire—his feet on the hob, his chair tilted back, a long clay pipe in his mouth, and his wig over his eyes, so that the tie stood out from the back of his head, exposing the lower part of his shaven skull.

"Is that you, Slink?" he asked, without changing his position.

"Yes, your honour." Slink was content that his master did not see his face.

"Open the door sharp, and see if that old cut of a hostess has got her ear at the keyhole."

"No one there, your honour," said Slink, having opened the door and looked at the keyhole.

"I want you to tell me about your late master, and the family, and all that."

Slink gasped a sigh. "You want me to tell you why I left—and all about Jenny."

"Hang Jenny—we had all about her yesterday. I see I must cross-question you as if you were in the dock. Now then—how long have you been at Talbot Hall?"

"Four years come Christmas, I went——"

"Admiral Talbot resided at the Hall, then?"

"Him and Mr. Thomas—I was——"

"Mr. Thomas was the Admiral's only son?"

"I think so."

"You think so,"—the Lieutenant turned hastily and spoke with eagerness. "You only think so—why do you think so?"

"Because he hadn't got any other."

"A fool! How old was Mr. Thomas Talbot?"

"Never axed him, your honour."

"How old do you think he was? plague take you."

Slink considered for some time, and then said he thought about eight-and-twenty.

"He does not stay at Talbot Hall?"

"No, he is always travelling in foreign parts; sometimes London, sometimes Cambridge, and such like. He comes to the Hall for a few days to shoot pheasants and things, and off he goes again. It was just the same with his father. He'd send word a couple of days before maybe to have a couple of rooms got ready, and then——"

"There was never anyone living constantly in the Hall, no women?"

"Oh! yes, there was."

Again the Lieutenant turned quickly, saying:

"You never said a word of that before, what kind of woman?"

"The prettiest that ever lived, and her name is,"—with a sigh that made the candles flicker—"Jenny!"

The Lieutenant bit an inch off his pipe stem and dropped a few oaths.

"You told me yesterday that Doctor Blandly came to the Hall to tell the steward of Admiral Talbot's death—when was that?"

"Yesterday."

"I mean, when did Doctor Blandly come to Talbot Hall, with that news?"

"Two months ago," answered Slink, after performing an arithmetical calculation with his fingers.

The Lieutenant finished his pipe without putting further questions.

"It is something more than a mere coincidence," he muttered, as he rose and threw his pipe on the fire.

"What did your honour say?" asked Slink.

"Nothing. You never heard the steward, or the Admiral, or Mr. Thomas Talbot, or anyone, ever mention anything about the Crewes?"

"I never heard the old Admiral talk about anything else."

"What!" exclaimed Barnabas, suddenly arresting his hands in the act of setting his wig straight. "You never mentioned a word of that, what did he say? quick!"

"He said such a lot," answered Slink, confused by his master's manner, "sometimes he'd say 'we've had a plaguey bad cruise,' and sometimes he'd say——"

"Oh! go to the ——. Fetch me my cloak and hat!" he growled.

Slink brought the cloak in silence, without attempting to fathom his master's petulance.

The Lieutenant stood before the glass arranging the ragged lace of his cravat, to hide its worst edges and conceal the dirty shirt beneath.

"Snuff the candle," he said. "This confounded light makes me look as if I'd had a barker blazed in my face."

As Slink extended his hand to take the snuff from the candles, the Lieutenant caught sight of his clean stout shirt.

"That's a good shirt, Slink," he said, taking a part of the sleeve in his fingers to feel the texture; "did you buy it yourself?"

"No, your honour; shirts was given me with my livery."

"Like the mare, eh? Ah, Slink, you won't get the magistrates out of your mind while you wear that!"

"I ha'n't got no other."

"Well, we must arrange that for you, my good fellow; I will give you one of mine—the one I've got on my back. You leave yours in my room to-night—and those boots, Slink!"

"They're just the same as the mare, your honour," Slink whimpered.

"Don't snivel, my lad. Your foot looks about the same size as mine, and I'll give you mine rather than you shall go without. Off with them. What, do you wear socks, Slink? You will find my boots more comfortable without any, that's why I haven't worn them, but with yours it will be different. Pull them off."

"There's my coat and hat downstairs, perhaps your worship wouldn't mind taking them."

"No, Slink; you must wear them yourself; don't over-ride the willing horse, my man. I've given you a horse and the best part of a suit of clothes. Don't ask for more!"

Slink, painfully conscious of his own ingratitude, blushed as he helped the Lieutenant put on his coat.

"You can sit here in my absence," said Barnabas, "and if the old woman asks any questions, you know how to answer her. You can have whatever you like to call for." He cocked his hat on one side of his head, took his heavy-handed riding-whip, and opening the door, added, "I'm going out for a stroll. Pish! what a stench of stale beer." Then with a fierce glance at the hostess, who was sitting at the door of the parlour with her knitting on her lap, he strolled leisurely out into the open air.

"Ah, you wouldn't go afoot if you could get at your horse,

"I'll warrant," soliloquised the hostess, looking after her ill-favoured guest.

She was quite right in this conjecture.

CHAPTER III.

DR. BLANDLY.

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS lounged along idly until he had passed the little general shop which marked the end of the village, then he pulled up his collar, set his hat firmly on his head, and smartened his pace. Ten minutes brisk walking brought him to the end of Black Cap Lane, and into the high road opposite the cluster of trees known as the "seven sisters;" here he turned to the left, and continued his "stroll," passing Tottenham Cross, Lower Tottenham, and Upper Edmonton with undiminished speed until he reached the "Bell" Inn, where he paused to recover his breath and wipe the perspiration from his face. Five minutes later he rang the bell at the garden-gate of Dr. Blandly's house.

"No light to be seen," he muttered, looking over the gate at the house which stood back behind a large cedar. "He can't be in bed yet awhile, it has only just gone seven; yet he's such a queer old put. Ah, thank goodness, there's a light."

A bent old man came from the house, and opening the little square door behind a grating let into the gate, peered through.

"You needn't be afraid, Jerry, it's only your young friend. Is your master at home?" said the Lieutenant, who spoke civilly to no one unless he was obliged.

"Ah!" grunted Jerry, who evidently recognised the speaker, "if it's only you, you can wait there while I go and see if master be at home." He closed the grating and walked slowly back to the house, chuckling audibly in response to the curses of the gentleman on the other side of the gate. The old servant scraped his shoes carefully, closed the door, and rubbed his feet on the mat in the same methodical manner, stopped in his passage across the hall to see what the time was by the dark-faced, long-bodied clock, and finally tapped at the door of Doctor Blandly's sitting-room.

"Come in," said the Doctor; "fifteen two, fifteen four, a pair's six and jack, queen, king—that makes nine. Is that you, Jerry?"

"Yes, master; shall I wait till the game's finished?"

"What do you want?"

Jerry stood by the door; a screen stood between him and Doctor Blandly. He stepped forward to the side of this screen and stood there, smiling blandly on the comfortable tableau before him, while Doctor Blandly continued to count his "erns."

A sea-coal fire was blazing cheerily up the chimney. A dog sat behind the high brass fender, with his muzzle resting on the top. Between the fire and the folding screen which shut out the darkness and cold draughts, a card-table was set. On one side of it sat Doctor Blandly, pegging his score on the cribbage-board; opposite him sat the Reverend John Baxter, with a churchwarden pipe in his mouth, and a stern eye fixed on the Doctor's pegging. A kettle sang merrily on the fire, and its purpose was betrayed in a couple of steaming rummers set within reach of the players upon brackets adjecting from the side of the fire-place. The Reverend John Baxter, Vicar of Edmonton, wore his clerical dress and bands: Dr. Blandly wore a plum-coloured coat, a long, embroidered waistcoat, a snowy shirt frill and neck-handkerchief, knee-breeches, and thick, grey knitted stockings. Both were comfortably fat and red; the vicar had a jolly cheeriness upon his pleasant face, as indeed, at this moment, Dr. Blandly had also, but it had not the same expression of habitual content and sleepy satisfaction.

"Well, Jerry, what is it?" said Doctor Blandly, looking up.

"You look so comfortable and cosy, master, I don't like to disturb you. Shall I come again in five minutes? It'll do him good to wait."

"Him! Who?"

"It's only that there Mr. Barnabas Crewe. He's not in the house, Sir."

A loud ring of the distant bell added confirmation to this announcement.

"Show Mr. Crewe into the library, Jerry."

"When you've finished your game, Sir?"

"No; now. The Vicar threatens to go after this game, and I know he won't before, for I have not turned the corner yet, and it is his crib next time."

"Well done, Doctor; and it's past seven," cried Jerry, leaving the room.

"That Jerry makes himself too familiar, Blandly," said the Vicar. "Dear me, past seven! Mrs. Baxter will be growing anxious."

"I'll warrant she's not half so anxious as you are, Jack. I declare that when the clock strikes seven you look as if the Day of Judgment was dawning."

"Ben! Ben! I'll give you a sermon next Sunday upon profanity!"

"Do, Jack; and I promise to keep awake if you can invent any greater punishment for the wicked than that of having a scolding wife and faint heart."

"Faint heart, Ben, what do you mean? Do you think I'm afraid of Mrs. Baxter?"

"I'd give my best punch-bowl to hear you tell her you're not. If your sermons were only half as powerful as hers, what a well-ordered congregation you would have."

"Ah, Ben, you're not married!"

"Thank Heaven!"

"But you're as big a fool as I am."

"That's saying a great deal."

"Let me speak. I contend that you are every bit as weak as I am. Grant that I—that I—well, that I yield to the wishes of my wife——"

"Oh, that's beyond dispute."

"You dare not listen to me, knowing what evidence I can bring to convict you of the fault for which you condemn me. I may yield to my wife, but you yield to everyone."

"You must admit that I only give way where I see something to admire."

"Hem! that's a dig at Mrs. Baxter; thank you! Tell me what you see to admire in old Jerry, for you submit to his guidance entirely. If he tells you to go fishing for the day you go, though you catch nothing but a cold, and have to stop in bed all the next day by your servant's orders. He talks to you as though he were your equal."

"And so, by George! he is. A more faithful, honest, good-hearted man never breathed. Not a word against Jerry, Jack, for I love him, and he doesn't take me away from my friend at seven o'clock."

"I find fault with you, not with Jerry; though I admit his charms are less apparent to my eyes than to yours."

"If you appreciated charms with my eyes you would have more reason for self-congratulation; there would be no Mrs. John Baxter."

"You would have me believe that you were always a woman-hater, but you won't succeed. I believe that you are not married just because at one time you loved too well."

A kitten was sleeping on the Doctor's broad knee; he lifted it gently and put it on the rug, rising from his chair without replying to the Vicar. The genial smile passed away from his face for a moment, as the old wound bled under the rough

touch. The Vicar, inhaling the fragrant steam of his grog, noticed only the silence, and continued in a tone of triumph:

"Ha! ha! I've hit this time! It's clear now why you think all women mean, cunning, deceitful; you have trusted and been deceived."

The Doctor, drowning his old memory in the remainder of his grog, set down the empty glass, and with his former cheerfulness responded:

"If your conjecture is right, I have still the advantage over you, Jack. Say that I awoke one day to the fact that the woman was a fiend whom I had foolishly taken for an angel, one thing is certain——"

"Well?"

"I did not marry her beforehand."

With this Parthian shot the Doctor left the room.

There was a solitary candle alight in the library, where Barnabas Crewe walked up and down impatiently, while at the door sat old Jerry with a grim smile of satisfaction on his face. The doctor dismissed the janitor with a nod, entered the library, and closing the door behind him, said in a cool, formal tone:

"Now, Mr. Crewe, what do you want with me?"

Barnabas regarded the sturdy Doctor, who stood with his feet parted, his hands in his pockets, and a stern unflinching expression in his face, as he might have looked at a constable while determining whether he should show fight or bolt, and then he growled in sullen remonstrance:

"I've been waiting, outside and in, half-an-hour and more."

"For your own convenience, I suppose. No one asked you to come, or requested you to stop. What do you want?"

"Money."

"You might have saved yourself the trouble of coming to me for it; I have none for you."

"But I must have it. There's my horse locked up in an inn stable at West Green, and I can't get it out until I have paid my score."

"Then you must do without a horse, or get a friend to help you; I am none."

"You will let me have a few guineas?"

"Not a farthing. I gave you fifty pounds in September."

"And it was gone in October."

"You should have guarded it better. I constantly warned you that the allowance might be discontinued."

"A deal of difference that makes to me! When I have money I spend it like a—like a gentleman."

"It is a pity you do not sustain that character in other respects. However, that is not to the point. You came here six weeks ago for money, and you did not get it; you will get none to-night."

"It is December now, the next fifty will be due on the 25th; I only ask for an advance."

"I told you when you were last here that the individual who has made you this quarterly allowance, no longer lives; and that the continuance of the payment depended upon the generosity of his son."

"And is the son disposed to be generous?"

"I cannot say. I hope to know his decision before the quarter-day."

"Will you tell me why this money is paid me?"

"No." The Doctor spoke with emphasis.

"Supposing this money is mine by right, and supposing I choose to take my fortune in a lump, instead of having to come here like a beggarly tax-collector to take a fourth of my income every three months."

"Well?"

"And supposing I know from whom I have received this money." Barnabas fixed his eyes on the Doctor to see what impression his words made. "And supposing I went to a certain hall, not ten miles from Sevenoaks in Kent"—the Doctor started, and Barnabas, satisfied with his observation, continued: "and asked Mr. Talbot the question I have put to you—what would be the result?"

"Mr. Talbot would say to you, 'I know nothing about it.'"

"Know nothing about it, when he pays me two hundred a year!"

"Exactly so."

"But you know Mr. Talbot—it's no good denying that—Mr. Thomas Talbot, son of Admiral Talbot."

"Who was killed in the battle off Cadiz. Certainly. Now listen. If you go to Mr. Talbot he will say, 'I know nothing about it—you must ask Dr. Blandly,' and when you come to me, I shall say, 'I will give you not another farthing so long as you live.' Do you understand me? I will make it clear to you. I desire that you shall never speak to Mr. Thomas Talbot. While you conform with my wishes in this respect, I will continue the payment of two hundred pounds per annum to you and your brother Gerard, supposing that Mr. Talbot consents to pay the sum granted by his father; but the moment I find you have departed from this condition, I shall stop the payment. Is that plain to you?"

"Do you mean to say that it is optional to you?"

"I do. So now, Mr. Crewe, you will see that your policy is to behave yourself decently. I do not suppose that you understand what gratitude is, or I would point out to you that you have reason to be thankful you have not an ordinary man of law to deal with. There are few men who would take the trouble I am taking to secure you two hundred a year after receiving such impudence as I have endured."

With the bad grace of a hound who swallows an unsavoury morsel, fearing the consequences of refusal, Barnabas Crewe gulped down the moral of this lesson and departed. He refrained from cursing the old servant who let him out, and turned moodily to return to the "Black Boy."

He felt no gratitude towards anyone in the world, but at the same time he was not disappointed with the result of his visit to Doctor Blandly. He had assured himself of a fact which might serve as the stepping-stone to fortune; there was the hope of many things—money, ease, orgies.

Coming into the warm glow of light shed from the window of "The Bell," he paused. Walking and subsequently talking had made him dry; waiting had also made him cold. Never in his life had he felt more inclined to drink hot spiced ale; but not a penny-piece could he find in any of his pockets, he had given his last coin to Slink. So he was compelled to make the long return march—thirsty, which he took as a warning to be less generous in future.

CHAPTER IV.

BROTHERS.

WEST GREEN is now a busy settlement, with a railway station in its midst. Possibly it has lost even its name. At the beginning of this century it was a quiet rustic village on the edge of a pleasant green, where geese fed in the summer morning, and young fellows met to play cricket and quoits in the evening. In one corner stood a village pump, the village stocks, and the cage just where Black Cap Lane made a junction with Throttle Street—significant names, which the builders of genteel villas have euphemised considerably.

The stocks were in good repair, and the cage had lately received a new set of stout bars. These facts were noted by Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe as he returned to the "Black Boy,"

for he stopped by the pump to refresh himself, and were remembered the following morning when he came to consider what was next to be done.

"I'm not afraid of the old hostler, and I'm not afraid of the old woman," he reflected, shoving his chair from the breakfast table. "When Slink goes to feed the nags we might clap the saddles on and bolt; that's the simplest way out of the difficulty. But there's a baker o' one side and a blacksmith t'other—and there's that cage and the stocks on the green. I'll warrant the old woman's on good terms with her neighbours. She's outside talking to some one now. Wonder who? Oh, there you are, you old tabby, are you; talking to two men, and one as like a constable as needs be. Bolting won't do with these gentry about. Might take the mare and leave Slink here with the old screw; but I shouldn't get anything by that bargain. Besides, I don't want to lose my young friend Slink yet awhile. He might be a plaguey good catspaw for me. Halloa, a man on a horse to add to the party, and he looks as much like a cursed catch-thief as the other. It would be pleasant to sit in the stocks a day like this! I must pay my reckoning somehow. I wonder if Gerard's in town. I must go and see; it's my only chance. Shall I attempt to get the mare out? Ten to one she'd refuse to let either leave the house until her bill's paid. Better not try; it might lead to unpleasant consequences."

The result of this decision was that Lieutenant Crewe presently lounged out of the inn to take another stroll. After walking from one end of the village to the other with affected carelessness, he turned down Hanger Lane leisurely, whistling a tune and slashing the air with his whip. At the bend of the lane he turned round, and seeing no one, at once ceased whistling and strode out rapidly. From Hanger Lane he took a path across the fields, passed Hornsey Wood, and so after an hour's stiff walking he came to Charing Cross. Thence he walked to St. James's, and at length arrested his steps before a highly-respectable private house in St. James's Street.

"There's a dry march and violence to follow if Gerard's not at home," he muttered, as he pulled the bell.

A servant opened the door.

"Is Mr. Gerard Crewe in town?" asked Barnabas.

The man looked at him from top to toe, and then asked:

"What do you want?"

"Want to see him. If he's in town I'll run up to his rooms. I know them," answered Barnabas, putting his foot in the doorway.

"Take your foot away, and I will see. What name?"

"You can say Mr. Barnabas," replied the Lieutenant, withdrawing his foot reluctantly, after looking at the servant as if he would like to strangle him. "It's always the same," he muttered, as the door closed, leaving him on the safe side of the threshold. "If I was a bum-bailiff they wouldn't look at me more suspiciously or take greater pains to keep me out of the house."

The servant presently returned, and led the way to the first floor, where he opened a door and admitted the scowling visitor.

There was no one in the room. Barnabas threw himself in the most comfortable chair he could find, tilted his hat forwards to rest his head against the back, crossed his legs, and looked round the room from under his hat with envious discontent. The apartment was heavy and dark, the furniture and appointments were ugly, but all was in keeping with the taste of those days, and betokened the proprietor's wealth and "elegance." While his eyes were yet wandering from one costly article to another, a door communicating with an inner chamber opened, and Mr. Gerard Crewe entered.

Mr. Gerard Crewe was a tall, delicate-looking gentleman of five-and-twenty, with sharp clean-cut features, a pale complexion, and dark brown hair tied with a ribbon. The expression of his face was cold and severe; his dark grey eyes were well sunk; his mouth was firm; his teeth particularly white and regular. He looked like a student, a poet, an artist, anything indeed but the brother of the heavy-browed rascal before him. A fine cambric handkerchief was round his throat, secured with a long, narrow diamond-set brooch, the ends, edged with lace, fell upon his embroidered waistcoat. He wore an open dressing-gown, black silk stockings and morocco shoes.

"Well, Barnabas," he said, closing the door behind him.

"And well, Gerard," answered the Lieutenant, still examining the expensive articles of furniture, and not moving his position in the least. "We won't embrace. That would be about as unpleasant to you as to me. I'll warrant you're not pleased to see me."

The fact was too obvious to need comment. Mr. Gerard Crewe sat down, crossed his legs, clasped his thin white fingers over his knee and looked at his brother with a faint expression of disgust in the angles of his lips.

"Pictures, books, chuney, gimcracks, gewgaws, everywhere," growled Barnabas, then turning his evil eyes upon

Gerard and scanning him, he continued, "silk and satin, cambrie, lace, diamonds."

"Do you want an inventory of my possessions?"

Barnabas brought his hands from behind his head, sat upright, and with a sudden accession of malice, struck his flat on his knee, exclaiming:

"It's a cursed shame. Here are we, brothers, and the younger lives like a prince, while the other fares like a dog, and worse. One has to read books and look at pictures, and dangle about my lady this and my lord t'other, to pass the time away, while the other has to trudge a dozen miles, to beg a few pieces to pay for his night's lodging."

"You have no one but yourself to blame, Barnabas. You never would be led, and if of your own accord you insist upon walking in unclean places you must put up with soiled clothes. We started with the same advantages—except that your ambition was to be a blackguard, and mine was to be a gentleman. You always scorned my ambition, why do you envy me the result. You have no desire apparently to become a decent member of society."

"Oh! plague take your decent society. A pothouse and plenty is my motto. You keep your scents and civets, your powder and lace, your sneaking, cringing, bowing, scraping, lying, fiddling, squalling—What are you laughing at?"

"At your envying me the possessions you detest so heartily."

"Hang your possessions, I wouldn't give a fig for them all. It isn't them that galls me."

"Then what does?"

"Why it galls me that two thieves should be so unequally paid. Here am I, who drudge in the profession and starve, while you——"

"Control your tongue, or leave my room!" said Gerard, sternly.

"A man may tell the truth, I suppose," said Barnabas, dropping his voice, and speaking with dogged sullenness. "You don't want me to believe that you live like this on two hundred a year. Why, those diamonds in your handkerchief are a year's income at that rate. I'd have stuck to ciphering and reading, and quids and quods, had I known that they would show me how to cheat and keep a clean face to the world."

"Do you want me to throw you down stairs? That is not the purpose with which you usually favour me with a visit." Barnabas gnawed his dirty thumb-nail in silence, and Gerard continued:

"What have you come for?"

"Money."

"What have you got in your pockets?"

Barnabas thrust his hand into his pocket, and then held up a piece of black crape, with a coarse laugh.

Gerard took a couple of guineas from his fob and laid them on the table, saying: "Take them; and go."

"Wait, I've something more to say. Sit down."

"I can listen, standing."

Barnabas finished his thumb-nail, and said:

"Did you ever wonder why Doctor Blandfy pays us two hundred a year, a-piece?"

"I have never troubled myself to consider."

"I have. You may take your oath he wouldn't pay me unless he was compelled to."

"What then?"

Barnabas began upon his other thumb-nail, and instead of answering the question, put another.

"Do you know anyone named Talbot? Thomas Talbot—the son of Admiral Talbot, of Talbot Hall, near Sevenoaks."

"I may have met him."

"Will you take your oath you know no more than that?"

"I know no more."

Barnabas gnawed silently for a minute, then put another question.

"How far back can you remember?"

"I can remember nothing beyond the school where we lived from year to year."

"Nor I, worse luck! Have you ever heard of penitence penny?"

"No."

"It's a penny that thieves give to the poor when they have stolen a pound. I know men who never pass a church without slipping a penny under the door. They think it will make it all right, and square them at the last. Well, I'm pretty sure that it's the same thing which led our 'benefactor,' as Doctor Blandfy, an old fool! calls him, to provide for us while we were youngsters, and give us our present income. It relieved his conscience. We were cheated and robbed when we were too young to know anything about it, and this paltry two hundred a year is a restitution to me."

"To you?"

"To me. I am the elder, and if anything was taken, it belonged to me. Now, mark my words, Gerard—if you help me to recover it, I will give you half; we will share and share

alike, and I'll put my mark to any paper you like to draw up."

"That would be a valuable voucher," laughed Gerard.

"Don't you sneer at it; I may be a fool, but I've got cunning for all that. I'm on the true scent; and if you find anything out about young Talbot—if you meet him in society, and can get at his history—it shall be to your good. I'll go on my knees and swear to go halves, so help me —"

"Take your guineas and go. I know nothing of Mr. Talbot, and I refuse any kind of partnership with you."

The objectionable visitor was gone, but Gerard Crewe sat in the room, still in sombre meditation. He was not thinking of Mr. Talbot, nor of the source from which he had derived his education and part of his income, the subject had gone from his mind the moment that Barnabas quitted the room. He was asking himself if the charge brought against him by his brother was not true. His eyes were fixed upon a piece of rusty black crape that lay upon the rich carpet—the crape that Barnabas had exhibited, which had by accident slipped from his hand in returning it to his pocket.

"Are we alike, we two; thieves tainted and damned in our own conscience, and differing only in fortune?"

He rose and took up the crape with the tongs and put it upon the fire, and watched it smouldering away in moody abstraction. "And that is all the difference," he murmured, coming to the end of his reverie; "a piece of crape! He wears the villain's mask: I don't."

He turned from the fire with an impatient movement, and returning to the adjoining room with a quick step, sat down to breakfast.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST VIEW.

THE hostess of the "Black Boy," crossing the stable-yard to cut a savoy in the garden beyond, found Slink vigorously grooming his horse.

"A decent-looking young fellow that, and works well," she said to herself, stopping to watch him.

Finding himself under observation, Slink raised his hand and touched his forehead with his knuckles respectfully.

"Where's your master?" asked the hostess.

"Gone for a stroll, marm."

"He seems mighty fond of strolling. What is his name?"

"Now what did he tell me?" Slink asked himself, scratching his ear thoughtfully with a corner of the curry-comb. "It wasn't captain, and it wasn't mister nor squire, for I can remember them."

"He is a gentleman, I suppose?"

"I'm not so sure of that," answered Slink, suddenly recollecting the caution his master had given him: "and now I come to think of it I'm sure he isn't."

"Well, you know what he is then?"

"He's a nobleman travelling in—what the dickens did he tell me he was travelling in? I've got such a plaguey memory that unless everything's written down for me in my book it all goes clean out of my head."

"You can read?"

"No, I'm no scholar; but if I've got a thing written down in my book, and anyone asks me a question, I just let him read my book till he finds out what he wants to know. It's not a bad notion for a young fellow just turned nineteen."

"I should like to see your book," said the hostess, trying to keep a grave face.

"So should I. I forgot to bring it with me. However, I've hit on another capital notion that I'll be bound will answer as well. I've put a dozen horse beans in my near side pocket; my off-side pocket's empty—no it isn't, there's one there. Now what's that for? Oh, I know. The young woman in the kitchen told me not to forget to wipe my feet when I came in. You see how it acts: and I'm bound to find it out, because when I'm not doing anything I have a knack of putting my hands in my pockets."

The hostess nodded approval, and Slink, highly delighted with this testimony of his sagacity, continued:

"I'll just get his honour to tell me what he is, and what he's travelling in; then I'll clap a couple of beans in my pocket to remember by. *That's* pretty good for a young chap, isn't it?"

"Hum. And how long have you had this master?"

"Ever since the day before yesterday."

"Where does he live?"

"I'm pretty certain he told me, but don't remember now. If I'd only thought of my beans before!"

"And where did he engage you? Do you remember that?"

"Oh, yes, well enough. It happened we were both waiting at the blacksmith's to have our horses shod, and his honour

came up and patted the mare, and beginning to talk in a sociable way about one thing and t'other, asked me wher I came from, and so on."

"And what did you reply?"

"I said I came from Talbot Hall, but I hadn't got a master, seeing that Doctor Blandly had wrote to the housekeeper to say he was killed in a battle by the French—plague take them! Then he seemed more interested than ever, and more kind, and said, seeing as I hadn't a master, he would take me into his service, and give me four times as much for wages as I had at the Hall."

"And you agreed?"

"Yes; but it were not for the wages altogether." Slink gave vent to a deep sigh, and hung his head.

"Mary tells me you've been crossed in love."

"And so I have; Jenny, the steward's daughter, the loveliest, prettiest maid in all Kent. She's pretty near broke my heart; one day smiling at me till I felt prouder and happier than the king on his throne, and the next day making fun of me, till I wished I was dead and buried. I threatened to leave her often, and she was always asking me why I didn't, and daring me to it, and the day before yesterday she crowned it all by calling me a fool, so feeling right down desperate, I accepted his honour's service."

"Tell me what has happened since."

"Well, we took a long ride that night, and stopped at an inn to sleep. Yesterday we crossed a river by a ferry, and then we rode until we came here."

"Did anything occur upon the road?"

"Nothing. I jogged on behind my master and thought of Jenny all the while, except when I raced the baker."

"Raced the baker?"

"Yes, while master went into an inn to drink something, and I was waiting outside minding the horses, a baker stopped to give his nag a drink at the horse-trough, and he began to make fun of this horse as I'm a-grooming on now. 'Why don't you get a pair o' crutches for him?' he says. 'Because,' I says, 'he can run faster without 'em.' Then his honour came out, and says he, 'I'll wager a pound my man can strip you and your cart between this and the next milestone, and give you up to yon elm for a start.' 'I ha'n't got but a crown, but I'll wager that and start level,' says the baker. 'Done,' says his honour. 'jump up, but mind, if there's anything in the road we make a fresh start.' 'All right,' says the baker, chuckling and laughing, and up he gets into his cart, and up I

gets in the saddle. His honour got up on the mare, and says 'One, two, three, off, you devils!' There wasn't nothing on the road, for why, it was nought but a ragged, country-side, out-of-the-way kind of a place. By the same token there wasn't any mile-stones. Well, the baker went ahead like the wind, and whack my horse as I might I couldn't gain on him, seeing that every moment he got more ahead of me. However, master kept up with the baker, and I just managed to keep in sight, when the baker pulled up his horse, for why, we'd run a couple of miles at least. When I came up I found his honour and the baker was having high words. 'I've beat him,' says the baker. 'No, you ha'n't,' says master. 'I've done a couple of miles and more, and your man's been getting further and further behind every minute,' says the baker. 'What do that argufy?' says his honour, 'you ha'n't come to the first mile-stone.' 'And shouldn't for a couple of hours if we keep along this plaguey road,' says the baker. 'Then you've lost,' says his honour. 'P'raps,' says the baker, 'but, anyway, I don't pay; why the horse ain't had a chance.' 'We'll put a end to this discussion,' says his honour; 'gentlemen always pays their debt of honour, and I'll take care you pay yourn. Just lay hold of the horse's head,' he says to me. The baker made to hit his horse and bolt, but his honour outs with his——"

Slink's narrative was interrupted at this point by the approach of his master.

"Madam, I will trouble you to let me have my bill at once. Slink, saddle the mare," he said, looking angrily from one to the other.

"You don't want a bill, my fine fellow; I reckon you're not likely to pay twice. Your score comes to six shillings," said the hostess.

"And dear too, for a scurvy pot-house. Take it out of that."

He pulled out a guinea with an air of contempt, and as the woman went off to fetch the change, he said to Slink:

"What have you been gossiping about?"

"She wanted to know your honour's name, but for the life of me I couldn't remember it, but——"

"Is that all?"

"I was just saying how we raced the baker, and I was just coming to the part where you promised to blow out his brains if he didn't behave like a gentleman——"

"Hang you for a fool! Didn't I tell you you were to hold your tongue or give indirect answers?"

"To tell lies! to be sure you did; I forgot it altogether, but

it shan't occur again, your honour," and to remember it well Slink transferred a bean from his near-side to his off-side pocket.

When the hostess returned with the change the Lieutenant and his servant were in the saddle. Giving a key to the hostler, she said :

"You can open the yard gates, Billy, the reckoning's paid." Then addressing Slink, she added, "You take an honest woman's advice, my lad ; go back to your Jenny as soon as you can, and leave your fine gentleman to wait on himself."

Barnabas raised his whip as if to execute the wish of his heart, and strike the speaker, but prudence prevailed, and he let it fall upon the hony back of Slink's gift-horse instead, and the two sallied out of the yard.

They returned by the road they had come the day before as far as Southgate, where they dined : afterwards they left the main road, striking out towards Ware.

"Let me see what kind of a whip you carry," said the Lieutenant.

"I stand a good chance of getting another present," said Slink to himself, as he obeyed.

"Not a bad whip," said Barnabas, testing it on his leg, "but you will find your horse answer better to this,"—he handed his own—"he knows it."

"God bless your honour !" Slink replied, knuckling his hat. "My word ! It's as heavy in the handle as if it was loaded with lead."

"All the good whips are like that. Now listen to me, Slink ; I'm looking about for a man that owes me money, or his life."

"And your honour expects to find him in these lanes—well I never ?"

"Perhaps. However, I'm bound to find him sooner or later. I daresay he will pretend he don't know me, and doesn't owe anything, but I shall make him pay all the same."

"In the same way you made the baker behave like a gentleman ?"

"That's it ; and if it comes to an argument, or he tries to bolt, you'll just step in and give him a rap with the butt of your whip."

"Aye, if we're not lucky enough to have a constable near us."

"That's not probable, so keep your wits together." Barnabas flicked the mare, and they trotted forward.

They traversed the lanes without meeting any one but a

latourer, who, to give the approaching riders more room, scrambled through a gap in the hedge, and passed them on the other side.

It was getting dusk when they came into the high road, between Waltham Cross and Cheshunt. The Cambridge coach passed them at full speed, the horses' hoofs ringing sharp and clear upon the frost-bound road. The Lieutenant's mare was resting, Slink was fifty yards behind him. The moment the coach had passed, Slink put his horse to a trot, and not daring to look behind him, said in a tone of fright:

"Master, is the coach stopping?"

"No; what's the matter?"

"Is anyone looking round?"

"Yes, the passenger behind the driver."

"It's the Admiral's son, Master Tom. For mercy's sake let's take to our heels."

But Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe waited until the coach was out of sight, trying to fix in his memory all he could see of Mr. Thomas Talbot.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE COACH.

THE coach had left Cambridge with four insides and two outsides, besides the driver and guard. One of the outsides was a burly farmer, who sat on the seat next to the driver; the other was Mr. Thomas Talbot.

As they neared Royston, three female servants suddenly darted into the middle of the road, and with unanimous cries and gesticulations signalled the driver to stop.

"Peter!" called the driver, raising his chin from his collar and turning his head about three inches.

"Halloa!" responded the guard from behind.

"It's the gals' school; your insides is full, ben't it?"

"Yes, but as three of the insides is males, I'll be bound they can make room for some gals. Males can be wonderful obliging sometimes."

As the coach pulled up, the servants threw wide open the gate of the garden as if they expected the coach to enter, and ran up to the house beckoning and calling at the same time in a state of great excitement. There was a group of girls standing at the door of the large square house kissing and bidding farewell to one in their midst. One meagre lady of middle age

stood on the path imploring Miss Elizabeth to hasten, while a second, equally meagre, though possibly more middle-aged lady consulted with the guard.

"Can you make room for one young lady as far as Edmon-ton?" asked the guard, in an insinuating tone as he opened the coach-door.

"No, guard," cried a shrill voice that came from a further corner, behind the shoulders of an extremely stout old gentleman who sat with his hands on his knees and his arms akimbo, "we are already four, and that's too many."

"For my part," said the stout old gentleman, "you may stick in as many as you like; it will make no difference to me."

"What sort of young lady?" demanded a mild-looking young gentleman, who wore glasses and a simper. The guard slipping back allowed him to judge for himself.

The young lady had left the group, and with a composed and stately gait was walking down the path; a young lady apparently about eighteen, with a little white impudent nose, a saucy mouth, and large dark eyes.

"I've no objection to her sitting on my knee," said the gentleman who had not yet spoken; "but I tell you candidly, guard, I'm not going outside to oblige anyone."

"Nor I either," said the young gentleman with the simper; "especially if the young lady intends coming inside."

"I shall ride outside," said the young lady, after a glance at the closely-packed interior.

"But my dear Miss Elizabeth!" said the two meagre ladies in a breath.

"The afternoon is fine—I shall ride outside," answered the young lady, firmly.

"Well, guard, you must take great care."

The guard bustled off to unhook the short ladder and place it.

"I shall sit on the front seat."

"But, my dear Miss Elizabeth, there is a gentleman there."

"That is precisely why I intend sitting there. I prefer gentlemen to guards. Place the ladder here, if you please, guard." Having given this instruction, the young lady turned round to the house.

"Good-bye, Lady Betty!" called twenty young voices.

The young lady made three steps and courtesied to the ground, with the majesty of a princess.

"Thank heaven, we're not to have any more inside," said the shrill voice from the corner; "the coach is insufferably small."

"Large enough for me," said the fat man, "and it makes no

difference how many they choose to pack in. I always take my share of the room."

The coach started, and Tom Talbot commenced making his companion comfortable.

"Permit me to give you one of my rugs," said he.

"You have two?"

"Yes: would you like two?"

"Yes; but I would like you to have two also. They look large enough for both," she said, coming a little closer to his side, with a laugh.

"That is admirable economy! Tuck the edge under you so. Are you comfortable?"

"Quite. Are you?"

"For the first time in my life I am content."

"Content; is that all, sir?" asked the young lady, pouting her pretty round under lip.

"Happy, if you will; the words are synonymous in my mind. When I am content I want nothing to alter, and so I should like this coach to run on and on, until—until I saw you growing weary. Then my content would end."

The young lady smiled very sweetly.

"Such a pretty sentiment is worthy a more elegant name than content," she said.

"But you see I am not elegant," said Tom; "I'm the son of an English sailor, who to his last hour fought the nation whose fripperies our fine gentlemen imitate, and I think I have inherited from him my hatred of elegance—the elegance of society which leads men to cloak kindly thoughts and generous actions in such trappings that one cannot distinguish them from the artifices of the entirely heartless and selfish; that is the elegance I mean, and not the elegance which is born in the lily and the lady alike."

Again the young lady smiled; then looking at Tom, she said with an accent of regret:

"You don't like society."

"I like the society of Esquimaux; I prefer the society of Red Indians; I like the society of Swedes, of Dutchmen, of Germans, of all simple people. I like the society of horses and dogs; but I hate the society of men who powder and paint, who have only just given up wearing muffs, and who still shave their heads that they may wear the hair of somebody else."

"Everyone hasn't such nice hair as yours."

"It's a good serviceable crop—keeps my head cool in summer and warm in winter, and so serves the purpose that Nature intended it for."

"You have travelled much?"

"Yes, ever since I left college."

"College," said the young lady to herself; "he can't be the son of a common sailor, then."

"I prefer travelling to hunting, and one must do something," continued Tom.

"He must certainly be rich to travel for amusement," thought the young lady.

"And I have no particular talent."

"It seems to me you are in every way fitted for society," said she, responding to her own train of thought rather than to his last observation.

"Well, in being a fool, perhaps I am," he replied, laughing.

The young lady looked vexed; she was not accustomed to being laughed at.

"I fear you are annoyed."

"No; only I don't agree with what you say. Society, with all its faults, is not below the horses and dogs which you prefer; and, if I may be allowed to say so, one who relinquishes the society of English ladies alone, for Esquimaux and Red Indians, is not himself without a fault."

Tom opened his eyes in astonishment to find a pretty young lady, who was clever besides, and sufficiently wise withal to see the weak point in his character.

"I accept your reproof," he said. "Conscience has accused me before now of egotism in setting myself apart from the society which includes much that is good and admirable. After all, it is innate repugnance rather than reason which has actuated me. But I owe you my apologies none the less; will you accept them?"

She drew her hand from under the rug and gave it to him with a gracious smile.

"And now our hands are linked," said Tom, "may we not introduce ourselves? My name is Tom Talbot."

"And mine Elizabeth St. Cyr, better known as Lady Betty."

"I am your ladyship's humble servant."

They chatted on with increasing pleasure, for Lady Betty found that her companion was not half so ill-mannered nor so priggish as she had at first believed. His dress was not fine, she felt no ring through his glove when he shook hands with her, but still he was a grand figure of a man, and his brown face, if it was not handsome, had yet a frank honesty and genial kindness that won her favour. Had he been a fine gentleman she dared not have spoken to him so freely; but it

was impossible to maintain silence or reserve with one who had so much to say, and spoke his mind with such candour.

As for Tom Talbot, he was following in the footsteps of Hercules and Samson, and other mighty heroes, and having for ten years defied beast and man, and, be it added, woman also, he was willing now to set his neck under the dainty foot of the pretty young lady at his side.

"What bewitches me?" he asked himself, becoming absorbed in his own reflections. "Not her face; her features are not handsome, they are only pretty, though prettier never existed. Her complexion is exquisite, but the tint and texture of a skin are not sufficient to enthral one. Till the present moment I preferred dark complexions and hated red hair, but angels in Paradise should have a brow as white as hers, and such soft, gold-red hair should curl upon it for an aureole. Her voice is sweet, but I doubt if she could sing like that girl I met in Rome, yet she had no charms for me. I have said I could never like clever women, yet she is not so simple as a hundred I have known and forgotten. She is absurdly vain, that is certain, and affects, in her school-girl way, the airs and graces of a fine lady. What is there to admire? I know not, unless it be that her charms and faults are so blended as to make her at once human and divine."

"I believe you are not listening to me at all," said Lady Betty, laughing. "Do you know you are staring quite rudely at me, and have not answered the question I put to you?"

"To tell the truth, I was not listening to you. Abstraction is the fault of men who live too much alone."

"I may demand to know what you were thinking about."

"I can scarcely tell you. At this moment I am wondering if I shall ever see you after to-day."

"It is not likely, if we are to meet only on the tops of stage-coaches."

"When do you return to Royston?"

"To school? never. My education finished last night, and in a few months I am to enter that society which you so much dislike; are you sorry?"

"Sorry that I may meet you no more?—yes. Sorry that you are going into society?—no!"

"Not sorry that I am going into society! why?"

"Because I see you look forward to it with pleasure."

"That again shows a sweet feeling on your part, but——"

"But ungraciously expressed. Well, to be elegant, I might have given you another reason for not regretting your entrance to society."

"Tell me your other reason."

"Because it cannot fail to improve society. Which expression do you prefer?"

"The first. What a nice brother you would be."

Tom laughed.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked.

"I laughed—not at your compliment, that I accept with gratitude, but at the nice distinction suggested by it. I suppose I am altogether too rough and unornamental to be thought of as a sweetheart?"

Lady Betty blushed, then tossed her head, saying to herself, "Sweetheart! what a shockingly vulgar and old-fashioned expression! why couldn't he say admirer?"

"Peter!" called the driver, raising his chin from his buttoned over-coat collar, and moving his head two inches to the left as before.

"Halloa!" responded the guard.

"Do you know him coming along on the brown hoss?"

"Know him, ah! and better pleased to see him by daylight than by a lanthorn."

"Why, it's Cap'n Small-pox, be'n't it?"

"Yes, but he's got a new hoss, and a groom, if you please. Ho! ho!"

They passed Captain Barnabas Crewe, and the guard called out:

"You're got your hay-de-kong, Cap'n."

"And a lively hay-de-kong he looks too," said the driver.

"There's more of the calf than the fox in his face."

Tom Talbot, looking down at the "hay-de-kong" in question as they passed, exclaimed:

"Toby! my servant, or I'm very much mistaken."

"Did you say he was your servant, Sir?" asked the driver.

"Yes, who is the man he is with, do you know?"

"Don't know what he calls himself—we call him Cap'n Small-pox. He's on the road, if all we hear is correct."

"A highwayman?"

"Highwayman—ah!" The driver buried his chin in his collar.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM EDMONTON TO WINCHMORE.

"ARE there robbers about here—so near London?" asked Lady Betty, timidly.

"Robbers—ah!" responded the driver. "Plentiful as blackberries. The clerk at the 'Flower Pot,' in Bishopsgate, was reading the 'Times' yesterday as Cap'n Wallis, as I've met scores of times 'twixt here and Stoke Newington, was ketched at Pimlico turnpike with a brace of loaded pistols on him, and he's to be put to the bar for stopping a Mr. Snowdon five o'clock in the afternoon, twenty-third of last month, in King's Road, Chelsea, and lifting off him a silver watch, two guineas, a seven-shilling bit, and some small pieces."

"Five o'clock in the afternoon!" said Lady Betty, faintly.

"Five o'clock in the afternoon—ah! Don't matter to them, so long as there's no one about. Why, here the other day my old friend Johnny Clifford, a poulterer, as higgles round the country for chicks to take to Leadenhall, he was jogging along in his cart with his wife—it's his third wife—about this time of the day when, out of the cross road comes one of these captains and sings out, 'Money or your life.' Johnny just give his horse a crack to get off by running. 'Stop, dash your eyes! stop,' sings out this here cap'n, and blazes away with his barkers. Johnny's wife gives a scream and faints right away, and he being a tender-hearted sort of a man, pulled up for her sake, and just turned out his pockets. Howsomever, as this cap'n was holding out his hand for the money, Johnny snatched the piece of crape off his face, and knowed him at once for Cap'n Allard, as had been prowling about Southgate and Winchmore and away to Hounslow for weeks and weeks. Well, he give information——"

"You look frightened—there is not the slightest fear of the coach being stopped, and I think I am strong enough to protect you in an emergency," said Tom, seeing the terror in Lady Betty's face.

"Hush—I am listening!" she replied, leaning forward to catch the driver's words.

"Well, they bound my friend Johnny over to prosecute. This was wus than being robbed by Cap'n Allard. 'My lord,' says he to the Judge, 'if you please I can't prosecute, for I'm a poor man, and I've thirty-five children!' And that's a fact, he's had three wives, and you can read it in the 'Times.' The Judge ordered him to have half a guinea for his expenses in coming to London, and expenses of prosecution paid. But, lor bless me, what's that to this galloping Dick that everyone's talking about? Breaking a man's arm in Clapton one half hour, and robbing a lady of her earrings in the Marsh the next."

"Are you going on to London?" Tom asked of his companion, whose eyes were round as a frightened fawn's.

She shook her head and listened eagerly to the driver, who having begun to talk, seemed inclined never to leave off.

"Bless my soul, they'd rob anyone as they happened to find unprotected, and the worst of it is a gentleman don't know how to be safe. He takes a hackney coach, or a po'chaise to be safe, and ten to one the driver's in partnership with the highwayman—and there you are!"

Lady Betty put her muff up to her mouth, with an involuntary movement, and looked straight before her with scared eyes, as if she saw a dreaded highwayman threatening her.

"I ask you again, Lady Betty, where you are going to stop?" said Tom Talbot.

"At Edmonton. But oh! I have done a thoughtless thing—and—and I don't know what I shall do."

"Tell me what you have done."

"I insisted on going home to-day and mamma doesn't expect me until to-morrow."

"Do you live in Edmonton?"

"No, at Winchmore Hill, where that dreadful galloping somebody was seen—and there will be nobody to meet me, and it is getting dark, and I thought I should be quite safe if I hired a fly to take me from 'The Bell.'"

"You need be under no alarm."

"How can you say that? Don't you hear that all the post-boys and drivers are in league with the wretches?"

"Do you think that I am in league with them?"

"You are not a post-boy."

"No, but I can drive."

Lady Betty's face lit up with eager hope, and she ceased to give half her attention to the driver's narratives, which had gone by natural transition from highway robberies to highway murders.

"And will you—that is, are you going to drive——?" she hesitated, in some confusion, and looked into his face with a conflict of hope and fear in her mind, for he had said nothing of stopping nor offered her his protection.

"I am going to drive from Edmonton to Winchmore, and I will take you with me and deliver you safely to your mamma if——" he paused to prolong the suspense which gave light and shadow to his companion's young spring face.

"If what?" she asked with impatient anxiety.

"If Lady Betty pleases."

What more was needed to make him seem to her the most amiable, as he was the most handsome man she had ever seen.

Her gaiety returned, she chatted and laughed brightly, and ceased to attend to the driver's conversation, although his theme was now arson.

They alighted at "The Bell," where Tom ordered a tilbury to be prepared, and while the horse was being put in, he persuaded Lady Betty to drink a little hot negus, which she accepted with becoming reluctance, but drank with evident satisfaction.

It was but half an hour's drive from Edmonton to Winchmore, and Tom Talbot never used the whip once—he wished to lengthen the pleasurable journey, rather than shorten it: the edge of the red sun could be seen setting in a yellow glow beyond the delicate treework of purple boughs and woven twigs that bordered the horizon when they came in sight of The Chesnuts, which was the name Mrs. St. Cyr had given to her modest estate.

"There, there! Do you see the chesnut trees on the right, and the house lying back from the road with the blue smoke rising from the chimnies? That is my home," cried Lady Betty with excitement; "and there, above the apple-trees at the back, you can just see the pigeon-house. Ah, look! there they go, my pigeons, with Maggie, the black-and-white one, leading just the same as ever. And hark! that is Chloe barking. I believe she knows I am coming." A tear twinkled in her eye, and stood on her long dark lashes as she recognised these familiar sounds, and felt the full joy of returning to them. Tom groaned.

"Why do you make that noise?" she asked, turning to him and laughing, with a blush in her cheeks for the tear that dimmed her sight.

"Chloe, who hails your coming with pleasure, will whine when you leave. Do you take it I am less sensitive than a dog, Lady Betty?"

"I take it you are less faithful or you would not run away from me," she replied, archly. Turning her eyes again towards her home, she cried: "Ah, there's the gardener's boy sweeping up the dead leaves, and the gate is open. Drive right up to the door, and I'll keep my face behind my muff, and astound mamma by my sudden appearance."

She leaned back in the tilbury as Tom drove past the gardener's boy and by the circular sweep that led to the front of the house; but before they reached the door she had abandoned her idea, and was craning her neck to catch the first glimpse of the window.

"She is peeping behind the curtains to see who her visitors

are. I can see her pretty hand. Ah, there she is! Mother, dear mother!" she cried, and scarcely waiting for the horse to stop, she leapt to the ground and ran to embrace her mother at the door.

Talbot descended from the tilbury slowly, reluctant to approach in this meeting of mother and daughter. A mother's embrace, which he had never known, seemed to him to partake of a sacred character, and he feared to hear the enthusiastic young girl pouring out tender words of endearment intended only for her mother's ear. The first words that he caught were these:

"So you have had the palings painted green!"

There is a moment in the most joyful meetings of ordinary people when the expression of pleasure being exhausted, it is necessary to return to plain matter of fact. Tom had come within hearing distance precisely at this juncture. His illusion was dispelled, and his embarrassment also.

"My dear, you have not introduced this gentleman," said Mrs. St. Cyr.

Lady Betty turned in some confusion, for, to tell the truth, she had forgotten all about him in her excitement; then, recovering her self-possession, she introduced him with becoming formality. As suddenly she broke away from stately etiquette and said, with impulsive volubility:

"Mr. Talbot and I are friends. He has shared his rug with me on the coach, he has saved me from robbers, and he has brought me home to you. We must show our gratitude, mamma. A short time since he groaned. He was polite enough to attribute his sufferings to the prospect of leaving me, but I believe in reality he felt the pangs of hunger. When will dinner be ready?"

"At five o'clock, and if Mr. Talbot will accept our hospitality, he will not lessen our obligations, but at least afford us an opportunity of expressing our gratitude," said Mrs. St. Cyr with a certain formal grace that suited her admirably.

"Now I ought to return some long-winded compliment, but for the life of me I don't know how to do it," said Tom Talbot to himself, so he bowed in silence and murmured an unintelligible sentence expressive of his pleasure in accepting the invitation.

"It is too late to see the chicks, and the rabbits, and pigeons to-night I suppose, but I must run and say 'how do you do' to Chloë," said Lady Betty, and away she ran, leaving Tom Talbot with Mrs. St. Cyr.

The gardener's boy was instructed to take the trap into the stable, and a maid led Tom to the visitor's room, where he

proceeded to make his toilet, pausing occasionally to listen to the voice of Lady Betty, who at one moment was calling to the servant and her mother, at another laughing, and filling up the interval by singing snatches of ballads.

When he had washed, rested his hair, and flicked the dust from his boots, Tom left his room. At that very instant, Lady Betty issued from hers upon the other side of the passage. He had lingered over his preparations, she had hurried over hers. Each carried a chamber candle, and as they bowed, Lady Betty, tickled by the oddity of their position, laughed, and said:

"What a capital subject for a picture we present. Mr. Talbot."

"A subject that makes me regret I am not a painter," answered Tom, regarding her with unfeigned admiration.

Lady Betty looked more charming than ever in her simple evening dress. Divested of her furred pelisse and thick travelling coat, she naturally appeared taller and more graceful. Her dress was of pale lilac muslin, short-waisted, high in the throat, with a white tucker, short in the sleeve, which was looped up with ruby ribbon, and showed a snowy frill beneath. Every movement of her supple figure made a new, delightful curve, the clinging folds of her dress following the delicate lines of body and limbs. Her long arms were exquisitely rounded and white.

She knew that she was beautiful, and stood a moment to be admired.

This little exhibition of vanity explained how she had come to be called Lady Betty. Tom offered his arm, which she took with the grace of a princess, and descended the stairs. It was the first time she had received such attention, and being led down in this manner exalted her imagination.

"Oh, fancy," she said, "if there were candelabra all down the walls, and servants on either side of the stairs"—she stopped, looked at the candlestick she had in her hand, and with a sudden transition from grave to gay, added: "why then we shouldn't have to carry each our brass candlestick, should we?"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT "THE CHESNUTS."

A MAID executed a rapid flight from the drawing-room with a dust-pan in her apron and a brush under her arm, and Mrs.

St. Cyr appeared at the door, composing her features with a smile of welcome, as Tom Talbot and Lady Betty came to the foot of the stairs.

In the drawing-room Tom looked about him with fear, for the light was only sufficient to show him the danger of his position. Cabinets of *bric-à-brac* surrounded him on all sides, and tables loaded with china made two steps in a straight line perilous. The candles sputtered over the difficulty of maintaining their new-born light, and the smoke and flame of the fire in the chimney seemed not yet to have settled the question of ascendancy. Tom would have infinitely preferred the kitchen, but as he perceived the room had been prepared in his honour, he concealed his thoughts and piloted Lady Betty to the fire-side with no greater disaster than the smashing of a very ugly china dog, which seemed rather to gratify than displease Mrs. St. Cyr, who declared it would be worth double mended, the fashion having set in for pieced china.

Tom felt a little shiver run through Lady Betty's arm as it rested upon his, and seeing at once that if they were to be comfortable he must break through formal restraint, he took up the tongs and attacked the fire at once.

"You will pardon me, madam," he said, "but I am habituated to making myself at home under less hospitable roofs than yours, so I take in our first acquaintance the privilege of an old friend."

He knew how to make a fire and coax it into its most generous mood; so the temperature of the room quickly mounted.

Dinner, which was to have been served at five, was not announced until half-past six—a delay which Tom could regret on Lady Betty's account solely, since all that they were called upon to suffer in the form of cold and hunger was entailed by his own rashness in accepting an impromptu invitation. However, the interval was not insupportable, for Mrs. St. Cyr was half the time absent—the production of a "genteel dinner" calling for her personal superintendence—and Tom and Lady Betty found it just as agreeable chatting before a fire as upon the top of a stage coach.

Lady Betty did her best to charm the hungry visitor, and when a sweet girl smiles only a Goth or gourmand can look and think of eating. Nevertheless, Tom led the ladies into the dining-room, and took his place at the round table with a lively feeling of satisfaction.

The dinner was elaborate with innumerable side dishes: however, there was plenty to eat, and Tom's appetite was in a condition to appreciate everything. He would not listen to

Mrs. St. Cyr's profuse apologies, but praised everything, and declared that no King of France could have better cook than hers.

It was not until the dessert was served that Tom found time to examine the character of Mrs. St. Cyr, who, now that the culinary cares were removed from her thoughts, began to display the qualities of her mind. It was not long before he formed an estimate. She talked of nothing but fashions; of the movements in polite circles; of court balls; of forthcoming marriages in high life, and tattle about the aristocracy, whose names and family connections she seemed to have at her fingers' ends.

"I am agreeably surprised to find from the fact that you wear a ribbon, Mr. Talbot," she said, "that the 'Lady's Mirror' is in error respecting the fashion in which people of *ton* wear their hair. It was actually stated that perukes, except for evening wear, had gone out, and that the Prince of Wales had had his hair cut close behind and curled low on the forehead."

"That may well be, madam," replied Tom, smiling, "for I haven't had my head dressed for ten days, and then by a rustic at Cambridge. Previously I had been absent from England for five years, so I cannot profess to know anything of our fashions."

"You have travelled a great deal," said Mrs. St. Cyr, led by curiosity to diverge from her favourite theme.

"Yes, my father was scarcely ever at home, and I stood as good a chance of meeting him in a foreign port as in England."

"Your father was a sea-captain, I presume."

"An Admiral. He fell in the King's service before Cadiz."

"An Admiral!" Mrs. St. Cyr cast an expressive glance at her daughter, and said with a sigh, "Poor gentleman! But could not your friends or relations persuade you to stay amongst them?"

"Relations; I have absolutely none that I know of. My old friends are scattered; I found only two of my old companions at Cambridge, and my new friends are only just discovered."

Mrs. St. Cyr bowed, saying to herself, "No friends, no relations, and his father an admiral, dead! poor young man, he deserves to have friends, and he shall not go without while I live."

"It must be dreadful to have no home," murmured Lady Betty, looking at Tom with pity in her soft, sympathetic eyes.

"You make me think so by showing me how delightful a home may be," answered Tom.

"May I presume to offer you my hospitality while you remain in England, Mr. Talbot?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I shall be delighted to avail myself of it whenever a chance permits; but for some time business must occupy my attention to the exclusion of pleasure. I have come to England to settle with my father's legal adviser as to the disposition of the estate which comes to me. I stand in the peculiar position of a man with a white elephant—I don't want it, and I can't conveniently give it away."

Mrs. St. Cyr itched to know more, but Tom was thoughtfully engaged in scraping crumbs into a heap with his dessert-knife. Lady Betty came to her mother's assistance.

"You excite our curiosity, Mr. Talbot, and it is only fair to us poor women that you should tell us more. We have no white elephants," said she.

"It is very simple. My wants are supplied by a yearly expenditure of three hundred pounds; I could have lived content on half that sum. And now I am told that I have to make use of a yearly income of three thousand pounds, besides a Hall with thirty-nine rooms, and a park and grounds of a thousand acres. What am I to do?"

Mrs. St. Cyr held her breath; Lady Betty's eyes sparkled like the diamonds her mind dwelt upon as a possible elucidation of the vexatious problem this interesting young gentleman was called upon to solve.

"An estate, a Hall with thirty-nine rooms, and three thousand a year!" murmured Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I cannot—I should not wish—to dispose of the old Hall; it has borne the family name since John Talbot received Queen Elizabeth in it."

"It would be sacrilege!" exclaimed Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I certainly cannot live in it. Odd as I am, I could not abide the solitude of living alone in a great place like that."

The ladies did not see the necessity of living alone, but they held their peace, and Tom continued:

"I shall expect Doctor Blandly to help me out of my difficulty."

"Doctor Blandly! the name is familiar to me."

"It is quite possible; he lives at Edmonton."

"I know a Doctor Blandly, of Edmonton, who is a surgeon; he attended to my gardener when he hurt himself with a scythe. I remember the fact by the extremely uncivil answer he returned when, seeing how well he had cured my gardener, I wrote to him bidding him call to advise me on the palpitations to which I am subject. He sent word to say

he could give me no better advice than to eat moderately and not lace tight."

"It is probably the same," replied Tom, maintaining a becoming gravity with an effort, "Doctor Blandly was originally a physician, but amassing a competence while yet a young man, he gave up his practice and retired to his present residence at Edmonton to devote himself to botany and fishing. He is an odd, sweetly-disposed old gentleman, who professes to be a cynic and misanthrope; but, nevertheless, his innate goodness asserts itself on the slightest occasion, and is so well known, that he has almost as much employment in ministering gratuitously to the maladies of the poor around him, as he previously had in attending to his wealthy patients. He is a shrewd and honest man, and his friends have taken his advice whenever they found themselves in difficult positions. My father was his school-fellow, and it is thus that Doctor Blandly came to conduct the management of his property and estate. I hope he will continue his services in my behalf. I intend seeing him to-night, if you will permit me to leave at an early hour."

"Oh, Mr. Talbot, you will not leave to-night, the roads are dangerous," said Lady Betty.

"I shall have less fear in encountering danger than this afternoon, for you will not be imperilled."

Mrs. St. Cyr had been musing; she said suddenly:

"Mr. Talbot, I am about to ask a great favour of you, one that I feel scarcely warranted in asking upon such short acquaintance."

"You will do me great honour, madam, by such a mark of confidence."

"Will you introduce me to Doctor Blandly?"

"There is only one reason for hesitation, and that is the Doctor's avowed repugnance to the society of ladies."

"But you said that he professes a repugnance to mankind, yet he assists them."

"That is quite true."

"I should like to tell you my reasons for wishing the advice of such a man as Doctor Blandly, if it will not trouble you to hear them."

Tom Talbot made a gesture of complacent attention, and Mrs. St. Cyr, after a few minutes' thought, continued:

"Since my husband's decease I have lived in retirement, and, as you see, with economy, in order that the fortune he left should accumulate interest, and enable me, when Elizabeth left school, to introduce her to society and give her

an opportunity of forming suitable connections and friends before my death."

"Mamma, dear, don't talk of dying, you are a young woman now," said Lady Betty, the tears springing in her eyes.

"My dear, you do not know what I suffer with the palpitations."

Lady Betty drew her chair nearer to her mother, and slipping her hand under the table, took her mother's, and held it with a loving pressure, while Mrs. St. Cyr continued:

"The attorney who has hitherto managed my affairs died last week, and his partner is so old and stupid that I do not care to trust my financial arrangements to him. I know no one else, but it is absolutely necessary that I should find some honest adviser at once; my child's fortune depends upon it."

"In that case I feel sure Doctor Blandly will advise you."

"If you will introduce me as your friend."

"I shall have great pleasure in doing so."

"But mamma cannot go this evening!" exclaimed Lady Betty; "and so, Mr. Talbot, you must stay all night, and take her to Edmonton in the morning."

Tom accepted without waiting for further persuasion. He who would go out of his way to oblige an old woman, could not hesitate to stay in comfortable quarters to give pleasure to a young one.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

Mrs. St. Cyr kept a genteel pony-chaise, and as this would serve to convey her and Mr. Talbot the following morning to Doctor Blandly's, the tilbury was sent back to Edmonton, the gardener, who took it, being instructed to fetch the valise which Tom had left at "The Bell."

"What time will you be called in the morning, Mr. Talbot?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr, when they were separating for the night; "we usually breakfast at ten. Will nine o'clock be too early for your hot water?"

"Not a whit, madam."

"I rise at half-past seven," said Lady Betty, archly. "Good-night."

Mrs. St. Cyr followed Lady Betty into her room, and having closed the door silently and carefully, her first words, spoken in a low, impressive tone, were, "What a pity he hasn't a title."

"Why, mamma?" asked Lady Betty, with a blush.

"Because then he would be absolutely perfect, my love. The son of an admiral with an estate, a Hall with three thousand rooms, and an income of thirty-nine pounds—I mean a hall with thirty-nine rooms, of course, and an income of three thousand pounds. I am sure he deserves a title, and it is ten thousand pities he hasn't one. However, he has a pedigree, and that is a great thing. His figure is quite superb, and he is extremely beauteous."

"I don't think one can call him beauteous, mamma."

"Well, my love, we may differ in that, but I assure you when he was telling us that he was absolutely without relations, and had more money than he knew what to do with, I thought I had never seen a more handsome man in my life. And then his manner!"

"I do not think his manners perfect. He is at times brusque."

"It is that which gives him such an air of distinction. One cannot expect a man in position to agree with everything one says, and have a perpetual smile on his face as if he were measuring off a dozen yards of bombazine like your Uncle William. By-the-bye, my love, you must be careful never to mention your Uncle William's name: it would ruin our prospects to be known as the connection of a man in the drapery line."

"Mr. Talbot seems to entertain a thorough dislike to society."

"My child, it is not of the slightest importance what a man likes or dislikes before his marriage; it is afterwards that a woman has to conform them with her own."

"You have already settled that I am to marry Mr. Talbot then," Lady Betty said, laughing.

"Hush, my darling, you will be overheard. I certainly know no one more eligible than Mr. Talbot at present. It is certainly a great drawback his having no title, and to be sure many merchants have thrice his income; at the same time there are many noblemen who are as rich as the wealthiest commoner. I should like my son-in-law to have a title if it was only baronet; a lord would be better still, but my taste has always been for earls. I read the other day that the Marquis of Westminster's fortune is prodigious."

"Then there's little hope for Mr. Talbot," Lady Betty laughed again.

"My love! Mr. Talbot will think you are laughing at him, and I would not for the world displease him. He may be of the greatest service to us, for though we take the most genteel

house in Piccadilly, we cannot obtain friends without an introduction, and Mr. Talbot must have acquaintances. Besides, it is a great advantage to a young lady in society to have an admirer to start with; it attracts attention and collects others, like a fly on a treacle-paper."

"But Mr. Talbot will leave England as soon as his affairs are settled by Doctor Blandly. He has only seen me once for a few hours, and I am not sure that he likes me even. I believe he thinks me silly on some points."

"A very good sign. He wouldn't like you, depend upon it, if he thought you wiser than himself. And there's not the slightest doubt you have made a conquest. Perhaps you didn't notice how he blushed, faltered, and finally tried to conceal his emotion by drinking a glass of wine after you had induced him to try my pickle."

"It was too hot for him, perhaps."

"Oh, no, my love; a mother's eye is not to be deceived. And besides, what pretty girl is there who cannot make a man like her if she sets her mind to it? You have made your first conquest, and as to any fear of Mr. Talbot leaving England—well, he may think what he likes about it, but I know he will not. I shall ask him to dine with us on Sunday, and if he refuses, you may tell me that I know nothing of human nature. Now kiss me, my darling, and go to bed, for you have to rise at half-past seven, remember."

At that moment Tom Talbot was saying to himself:

"She has certainly the most beautiful arms I have ever seen in my life; she is graceful and fascinating to a degree, but—may Heaven preserve me from ever being fool enough to marry a girl with such a mother. She is absolutely vulgar with her eternal prattle about fashions, and her yearnings after the society of 'bong-tong,' as she calls it. I pity the poor girl, for I fear she has not sufficient force of character to resist the pernicious influence of such example and teaching. She is already a little touched with her mother's mania. As for myself, I must be careful how I yield to the witcheries of the little siren, though there's little danger in that. She wouldn't be likely to fall in love with me under any circumstances, and I suppose I shall never set eyes on her again after to-morrow morning. One is never romantic before breakfast, and she'll find me as chilly as the morning, I warrant."

With this satisfactory reflection Tom Talbot turned upon his side and fell asleep.

Tom Talbot was sitting in the drawing-room, gravely reading one of Mrs. St. Cyr's favourite magazines—"The Court

"Gazetteer and Lady's Indispensable Compendium of Life and Fashion" was its title—when Lady Betty came down the following morning.

"Are you improving your mind, Mr. Talbot?" asked Lady Betty, after salutation.

"Possibly; but not my temper. You have come in time to save me, I hope, from the worst effects of the book's splenetic influence. A few pages more would have made me doubt if there was anything in woman to admire but her beauty."

"You are more exacting than most men to want more than that. It is too early to be serious, and I am going to visit my pets. Are you ready to accompany me?"

"Quite—and you? I did not hear you enter the room. Have you your shoes?"

Lady Betty extended her foot with its neat shoe, giving a glimpse of a dainty ankle in a clocked black stocking.

"It is no wonder I failed to hear the fall of such a foot!" said Tom.

Lady Betty acknowledged the compliment with a coquettish courtesy, and led the way into the garden.

"Oh, what a lovely morning!" she exclaimed, "and no signs of the frost giving. Mr. Talbot, can you skate?"

"Fairly. As I do most things—not well."

"Will you teach me? There is a famous pond at the foot of the hill."

"Have you skates?"

"Not at present; but mamma can buy them to-day."

"You forget that after breakfast we part."

"No; you are going to take mamma to see an old gentleman who does not like ladies; but after that——"

"After that I leave England."

"On business?"

"No, for pleasure."

They had come to a wicket, which Tom opened; Lady Betty turned, and with one hand on the gate and the other on the post barred the way. She wore a tippet and a hood bordered with fur, which made a suitable frame for her pretty face. She held her head a little on one side; a smile made her eyes bewitching.

"Would it not give you as much pleasure to stay in England and teach me to skate?" she asked.

"Undoubtedly; but there are some pleasures that one should avoid to be happy. It will take me some time to forget you, though our friendship is not yet a day old."

Lady Betty ceased to smile. She looked up in Tom's face with unwonted gravity.

"It is a selfish kind of happiness that depends upon your not liking anyone very much," she said.

"Yet I do not feel as though I could be selfish when I look at you," said Tom.

"Then for my pleasure you would stay and teach me to skate?"

Tom bowed. "Where are my resolves of last night?" he asked himself.

At that moment Chloe barked, and Lady Betty, clapping her hands, cried, "I have been forgetting all about poor Chloe," and away she ran to the outbuildings where the dog was chained, leaving Tom to follow as he would.

"Hum!" said Tom to himself, "that shows how much she values the sacrifice. Forsaken, at the very moment when I should be most dear, for a yelping hound! If the frost breaks up she will not want me. And that I see is the best thing that could happen to me."

Turning a corner beside the orchard, he found Lady Betty on her knees with her arms round the neck of a Newfoundland, caressing the animal, and talking such unintelligible nonsense to it as dogs in common with babies seem to understand and enjoy.

"Oo members me all this time, Chloe, oo faithful old pet; and oo wants to come with oo's little Lady Betty, and oo shall! but oo won't frighten Lady Betty's pigeons, will oo?"

She unfastened the chain-snap, and Chloe, faithful to canine instinct, took to her heels and bolted off to the kitchen.

It was a moment of disappointment to Lady Betty; but her eyes following the deserter fell upon the hutch of her favourite rabbit to whom she at once transferred her affection. Presently, with a whirl and a flutter, the covey of pigeons settled on the roof of an adjoining shed.

"Oh, my pretty pigeons," she cried. Then she called Tom, whom she had sent off to the garden. "Mr. Talbot, Mr. Talbot! never mind about pulling up any more cabbages -- run into the stable for me quick, and bring some grain for my birds."

Tom obeyed, and brought a sieve of oats from a bin in the stable, which she took without so much as a single word of thanks, for she was talking to the pigeons in terms of tender blandishment, to which they responded in voices not more soft than hers, as they strutted and pirouetted on the ridge tiles. At the sight of grain they came fluttering to her

feet, and Maggie, a black-and-white patriarch, bolder than the rest, flew up, and ate from her extended hand.

It was a pretty picture—the young girl amidst her pigeons—which Tom looked upon with silent delight.

"And she is to be torn away from these innocent delights, and taught to like the heartless pleasures of a senseless world!" he said to himself, with a sigh. "She is a child and 'tis a shame to make her a coquette."

He did not recognise that the beauty of Lady Betty's childishness owed its piquancy to her coquetry, and that had she been merely childish, she would have been as uninteresting as the peasants of Flanders, whose extreme innocence he had frequently condemned for stupidity. Had she not been very pretty, it is tolerably certain he would not have cared a jot whether her tastes were simple or otherwise.

He still felt sentimental when Lady Betty, setting down the sieve of oats, said:

"Feed yourselves now, dears, Lady Betty's fingers are getting blue in her gloves. Come, Mr. Talbot, I will leave all my darlings for you, because—I am cold. Let us have a brisk walk, there is still plenty of time. We can walk down the hill and see if the ice bears. By-the-bye," she added, stepping along beside Tom with a quick, springy step, "we were talking about the ice—ah, yes, and you promised to teach me skating, at my earnest entreaty."

"When Chloe barked, and you forgot all about me."

"That was decidedly rude," Lady Betty laughed; "but you don't look very vexed with me."

"One could not see you so innocently happy and remember one's vexation. Will you not be very sorry to leave your pigeons and domestic creatures?"

"Oh, I shall be more than sorry to leave my pets. I do not mind admitting to you that I shall have more than one long cry when we separate."

"These simple pleasures seem to harmonize so perfectly with your disposition."

"As for that, my disposition is of an accommodating kind, and harmonizes very well with nearly everything that is agreeable."

"Seeing you among your present pleasures, I cannot imagine how you will relinquish them."

"Ah! you should have seen me with a doll," said Lady Betty gravely. "You might have thought it would have broken my heart to give it up. I buried it with tears, Mr. Talbot."

"Buried it!"

"Yes, the day mamma said I must have a long frock made, I made up my mind for the sacrifice, and the morning it came home from the dressmakers, I buried my doll—and many a time I was tempted to exhume it. It lies in the grave next to my canary."

"But a doll is not the same as living creatures."

"No," Lady Betty sighed, and then with a tone of resignation: "Everything in its turn. First sugar-sticks, then dolls, then pigeons and rabbits."

"You will not make a good exchange I fear for the latter."

"Why? Do you not think men and women are more interesting than rabbits and pigeons?"

"I imagine that you are not deburred from either in the country."

"Ah!" said Lady Betty, sententiously, "that is because you know so little about it—look at poor mamma, she has lived here ever since papa's death—nearly fourteen years, and she knows absolutely no one but the clergyman, who only talks about the lake of brimstone and fire, and the deaf gentleman that lives in the house down there, and his chief recommendation is that he never talks at all. A country life is delightful if you can always have a friend staying in the house, and if you can leave it for five or six months in the year."

Tom laughed, despite himself—Lady Betty continued:

"Why do you think a country life so suitable to me—because people living in the country are usually so intensely stupid?"

"A country life is allowed to be innocent and beautiful, and therein it seemed suitable to you!"

"Don't you think its charms are overdrawn? Poets who have written most about it live in towns and exaggerate the little they have seen to admire. I should like to see it as they see it—a little. One would think that the sun always shines, and roses continually fill the air with perfume; and lambs skip about to the tunes played by clean shepherds. They do not know what six weeks' bad weather in an isolated house is, they never saw a shepherd in the stocks for being drunk and using bad language, and they never mention the cries of a pig having a ring put in his nose. And what constitutes its innocences—highwaymen in the lanes to keep you indoors, with a fear of burglars that make you doubtful if it wouldn't be better to stop in the lane?"

"Do you wish me to believe that the country is disagreeable to you?"

"No. I love the country as well as you do—perhaps better, Mr. Talbot, or you would settle down as a respectable hermit with less fear of encountering the lively members of society whom you so detest. What I wish you to think is, that I have aspirations to a higher form of life than that whose most agreeable representatives live in hatches and kennels."

Tom was astonished by the warmth and strong sense of Lady Betty. He had seen her face coquettish and childish, but now he found it animated with an intelligent light, and almost severe in its earnest expression.

"There is nothing prettier than a brood of young rabbits, or a nest of blue eggs—no sound sweeter than the first song of the nightingale, but it would be wicked to limit my senses to the enjoyment of them when Providence has given me the intelligence to appreciate Raphael and Mozart. I do not profess that for high objects alone I prefer life to seclusion. I am fond of dress, fond of talking nonsense, and laughing at trifles, fond of farce as well as tragedy—though I have never yet been to a theatre except in my dreams—fond of gaiety and movement, fond of dancing, fond of having my eyes open for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four. *I hate yawning*, and now you know why a country life is not suitable to my disposition."

"You are very earnest," was all Tom could say in comment.

"I feel very earnest. You have roused me by your contempt for society."

"You will give me credit also for sincerity."

"Yes, but not for impartiality. You are quite narrow and prejudiced. You adhere to an opinion which by your own showing, was formed ten years ago, and which has been exaggerated by seclusion and—if I may add it without offending—ignorance of what you condemn."

"I am afraid that you are only too just—I was a young man, and I believe, even more conceited than I am now, when I settled that I was too good for society."

"In that case you ought, in justice to yourself, to reconsider the subject, and so when you have taught me to skate, you will yet have something to do before leaving England. Ah! here is the pond. Hold my hand and let me see if the ice is strong."

Tom took her hand and held it firmly as the urgency of the case required, while Lady Betty ventured across the frozen water with timid steps.

The ice did not crack, but the surface was wondrous slippery, and Lady Betty's foot slipped more than once, causing her to laugh and fear at the same time.

"It would be safer if you held my arm?" she said.

Safer indeed for her, but not for Tom. A thrill ran through his veins as he clasped the beautiful arm, of which he had dreamed, and he felt a strange gratification in sustaining their mutual position of dependence and support.

Before he relinquished his hold he had reconciled himself to the necessity of postponing his departure from England.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT.

"MR. TALBOT, how do I look?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr, as the chaise drew near Edmonton.

Tom looked at his companion in order to give a fair answer to a question which was asked with the utmost gravity. Mrs. St. Cyr was still pretty; her complexion was particularly fresh and fair, which, but for her stoutness, would have made her appear ten years younger than she was. The few artificial touches of pencil and powder were unnoticed by Tom's unpractised eye, and he answered with perfect candour, and in a tone which carried conviction:

"Madam, you look extremely well."

"I am glad to hear it, for I assure you I attach a great deal of importance to the interview with Doctor Blandly, and when a woman wishes to interest a gentleman in her business affairs, she cannot be too particular about her personal appearance."

Tom smiled. Mrs. St. Cyr continued:

"I assure you there is truth in my assertion. How is it that charitable ladies can never raise subscriptions? it is because charitable ladies as a rule are dowdy. Can you tell me if Doctor Blandly sees many ladies?"

"Scarcely any. A lady never enters his house—if he can prevent it—and he refuses invitations where it is possible he may meet ladies. I have heard him speak occasionally, and not in amiable terms, of Mrs. Baxter, the wife of the Reverend John Baxter, a particular friend of his."

"Mrs. Baxter! I know her by sight—a woman who looks as if she had been buried for a week, and unfortunately resuscitated. If Dr. Blandly has seen only that woman, I am not surprised at his aversion to the sex."

"I hope you will convert him, madam."

"I am not without hope. It is a great advantage to know

his character beforehand—he is very fond of botany, you said, I think?”

“Yes; and of fishing also.”

“Unfortunately I know nothing about fishing; happily I have some knowledge of gardening. Augh! what a horrible smell.”

“Some one is burning weeds.”

“It is shameful to allow such a public nuisance; it is worse than a brick-kiln. I shall carry the odour in my dress, and that will undo everything. And now look at the smoke! John, John!” she called to the gardener who, dressed in livery, was driving the chaise. “Drive quicker. Beat the horse! Quick, quick, I shall be smothered. I must be covered with smuts.”

“I assure you your complexion ~~was~~ not suffered.”

“And my bonnet, Mr. Talbot? I tried on half a dozen before I found one to my liking, and this light beaver must catch the blacks, I am sure!”

“Not a speck, madam, and we have passed the smoke.”

“Dear me, we are just in the high road, and close to Doctor Blandly’s house. Let us drive the other way for a few moments that the smell may escape from my clothes. Turn to the right, John. And after all the precautions I have taken.”

“Doctor Blandly being a gardener may not dislike the smell of burning weeds.”

“It is impossible any human being can endure such a stench as that. However, I have my lavender-water with me, and if I sprinkle some of that over my dress it may at least counteract the smoke. Ah, I have brought civet by mistake; but it will have the same effect. ’Tis an elegant perfume. Can you tell me if Doctor Blandly has any other likings, Mr. Talbot?”

“He likes cribbage, and punch, and a pipe.”

“Thank you. If I were a general I should never offer battle to my enemy until I was thoroughly acquainted with his weak points. I think we may turn now. John! turn round—stop at the first house past ‘The Bell.’”

A sudden change in the wind wafted the offending smoke down the lane which ran between Dr. Blandly’s garden and “The Bell,” and blew it across the high-road at the very moment the chaise was passing.

“Oh, if I were a man!” said Mrs. St. Cyr, through her closed teeth, “how I would swear!”

The condition was not much better when they stopped in front of Doctor Blandly’s house, a thick cloud of smoke filled the garden.

"We will pass thro' it as quickly as possible," said Tom, handing Mrs. St. Cyr from the chaise. "I know the secret of opening the front gate, and I may dispense with formalities in visiting the Doctor."

Mrs. St. Cyr kept her handkerchief to her mouth, and said nothing.

"Hilloa, who's there?" called out old Jerry, as he came from among the evergreen shrubs, on hearing the gate open.

"A friend, Jerry. Where is your master?"

"Oh, 'tis you, Mr. Talbot, hey—right glad to see you, Sir." He suddenly stopped, and looking at Mrs. St. Cyr, passed his hand thoughtfully over his mouth and chin.

"J. your master in the house?" Tom repeated.

"No, he's looking after the bonfire in the kitchen garden; but do he know, Sir, that you are bringing all the world with you?"

Tom passed by with Mrs. St. Cyr, only saying, "I will find him," and opening a wicket by the side of the house led her into the garden at the rear, taking the weaker side of the dense column of smoke which filled one half of the garden and swept over the wall.

In the murky distance could be seen the outline of a stout man forking litter from a barrow on to the smoking heap.

"That is Doctor Blandly," said Tom, in a low voice, to his companion.

"Doctor Blandly! I expected to find an old gentleman with white hands and silk stockings examining botanical specimens through a magnifier; and it is his fire that is making this smoke." In a moment Mrs. St. Cyr took the handkerchief from her mouth, and assumed as amiable an expression as could be arranged in the time.

Doctor Blandly did not hear the approaching footsteps, for he was singing and working at the same time, with his back to the house.

"Up came a pedlar whose name was Stout,
And he cut her petticoats all round about.
Singing, Fol dol de rol! hi, fol de rol!"

At this point Tom, not knowing what lengths the pedlar whose name was Stout might go in the following verse, thought proper to interrupt the Doctor's song by a tolerably loud cough.

The Doctor ceased to sing, and turned to see who his visitor was. Mrs. St. Cyr looked at him incredulously. Could this be the lawyer, the physician, the retired gentleman of whom she had heard so much praise. Indeed Doctor Blandly looked very unlike the popular conception of a gentleman. He wore

a brown cloth sleeved-waistcoat, a pair of fustian breeches, grey worsted stockings, a coloured handkerchief, and a red worsted night-cap, drawn well over his ears to compensate for the absence of his wig, a pair of well-worn leather garden gloves completed his dress.

"What, Tom my boy!" he cried, thrusting his fork in a heap of weeds. He came forward, pulling the glove off his hand, looking from Tom to the lady on his arm in blank astonishment. He gave his hand to Tom, who said:

"Let me present a lady to you, Doctor Blandly—Mrs. St. Cyr."

"Mrs. St. Cyr!" said Doctor Blandly, in a tone of deep relief. "Ah, my boy, I was afraid you had made a fool of yourself. But you are still a bachelor, I can see that by your face—cheerful and content, thank Heaven!"

He made a stiff bow to Mrs. St. Cyr, who responded with her sweetest smile, and said:

"I am charmed to make your acquaintance, Doctor Blandly. I assure you I take this introduction as the greatest favour that my dear friend, Mr. Talbot, could render me."

Mrs. St. Cyr struggled bravely to the end of this speech, and then began to cough violently, a gust of wind having driven the smoke across the garden.

"Dear friend, eh?" said the Doctor, in a low voice to Tom, while Mrs. St. Cyr was still coughing. "Looks like a widow. Nothing foolish going on, Tom. Not going to be caught by such a fly as that, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you," Tom whispered.

"Thank Heaven! We will go in the house now my mind is easy on that point. I am afraid the smoke irritates your throat, madam."

"A little; but it is of no importance, and I assure you I quite like the smell."

"I don't, madam; there's a bone or a piece of flannel got into the fire. Pough! Don't you smell it, Tom?"

"No, Sir; nothing but the ordinary smell of burning weeds and earth."

Mrs. St. Cyr pressed down the stopper of her scent-bottle, with a fearful consciousness that it was the civet which offended the doctor's nostrils.

"Oh, there's something else;" said the Doctor, sniffing the air about him with dissatisfaction, and pulling his snuff-box from his breeches pocket. "Take a pinch, my boy? Hum! Do you snuff, madam?"

"No. I hear that snuffing for ladies is going out of fashion in polite circles."

"Mrs. Baxter snuffs."

"Mrs. Baxter! One cannot be surprised at her doing anything that is unpleasant."

"That's what I say, madam, and the parson can't deny it; all he can say in her behalf is that she's no worse than other women. Pough! Haug that bone! I can't get the smell of it out of my nose."

"I am sure I can't tell what there is to object to in the smoke, Doctor Blandly," said Mrs. St. Cyr; "it is very—oh, very refreshing and agreeable."

"That is not the only subject on which we should probably disagree, madam."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. St. Cyr, anxious to provoke a controversy which might offer her an opportunity of yielding, "I think we should agree upon most subjects. To begin with, I am passionately fond of botany."

"Do you dig, madam?"

"Dig! Oh, Doctor, how can you ask such a question?"

"Because no persons can love botany unless they do. I advise you to try digging. Well, my boy Tom, so you have come to see me at last. And the Admiral has paid the debt of Nature—the only debt he ever had—and I have lost an old friend and you a father."

Tom nodded in silence.

"Poor dear old gentleman!" sighed Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I see no reason to pity him, madam; he fell as he wished to fall, giving his life for his country, a gallant English gentleman. May I ask, Tom, why you have brought a visitor with you?" The Doctor put the question in a tone of unconcealed irritation.

"Mrs. St. Cyr has urgent need of your advice; that is a sufficient explanation."

"Oh, you are in trouble, madam," the Doctor said, with less acerbity in his tone.

"Indeed I am. The legal adviser I have relied upon exclusively for many years is dead. I have lived in seclusion for so long that I know absolutely no one to whom I might apply for advice, and my affairs are of a delicate nature, which I should hesitate to lay before an ordinary—a selfish—a——"

"Enough, madam, we will go into the library at once. Tom, you know the house; make yourself at home, my boy. By this door, madam. Heugh! I'll be hanged if that stench hasn't got in the house!" Opening the library door to Mrs. St. Cyr, he called to the gardener's wife: "Martha, tell Jerry to go and look to that fire, there's something got into it that's

stinking—that's poisoning the house out. It must be the bones of that pike I caught last Tuesday."

Mrs. St. Cyr felt sure it *must* be her civet and hastened to divert the doctor's attention, and as Doctor Blandly closed the door, said :

"Ah, you are a great angler, Doctor Blandly. I must say I know very little about the science."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Doctor Blandly, in parenthesis.

"I have only fished once, and then sat all day in a punt and caught nothing."

"Nor any one else on that occasion, I imagine." Then he added to himself, "Good Lord, how she would talk! A woman in a punt for a day's fishing. One might as well have a boy with a set of clappers and a horse pistol."

"To tell the truth I prefer domestic amusements. Cribbage for example. I could spend all my time playing cribbage."

"Glad to hear it, madam. I'm sure you couldn't spend your time to greater advantage. Now, if you please, we will come to the purpose of your visit."

Doctor Blandly sniffed the air, looked around him fiercely, took a pinch of snuff, and pulled his chair up to the table.

CHAPTER XI.

OIL AND VINEGAR.

"WHAT I am about to reveal is in strict confidence, Doctor Blandly, in perfect reliance upon your secrecy," Mrs. St. Cyr said, laying emphasis on the words *secrecy* and *confidence*.

"You need be under no apprehension, for in the first place a man knows how to hold his tongue, and in the second he very seldom hears anything from a woman that is worth repeating," said the Doctor.

Mrs. St. Cyr seemed to gulp down her feelings with difficulty before recommencing.

"I must tell you at the commencement," she said at length, lowering her voice, "that my husband's name was Brown. At his death, for reasons which will be obvious to you presently, I resumed my maiden name. This fact is unknown to any one, my daughter being too young at the time to understand matters of this kind, and my life for the past fourteen years having been a secluded one. There is nothing culpable in changing one's name; nevertheless, I have kept the fact secret even from my daughter."

She paused, expecting perhaps that Doctor Blandly would express his disapproval; but he said nothing. He nodded as a sign for Mrs. St. Cyr to continue. A doctor and a lawyer are accustomed to hearing confessions, and are only anxious to avoid increasing the embarrassment of their clients, which too frequently prevents them from making a candid statement of their case.

"My father held a good position in society. He lived constantly up to his means. I had many lovers, for I was considered pretty then, Doctor Blandly." The widow paused again for the Doctor to make a compliment, if there was a spark of gallantry in his nature. Doctor Blandly fished out a stick from the miscellaneous collection of rubbish in his left hand pocket and a knife from his right, and looking at the stick thoughtfully, opened his knife and proceeded to trim it up for the purpose of marking the spot where he had sowed some seed.

With a sigh, Mrs. St. Cyr continued:

"My father died suddenly, leaving me penniless. My lovers forsook me--all except one whom I had encouraged the least. He was the poorest, and his name was Brown. There was no choice between marrying him and starving. I married him; three years after our marriage my husband died."

"The wisest thing he could do," said Dr. Blandly to himself, as he carefully shaved his stick.

"You follow me, Sir?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr, seeing no sign of interest in the Doctor's face.

"Perfectly. I never heard a woman keep to the point so well. Three years after marriage your husband died."

Mrs. St. Cyr, thus encouraged, proceeded:

"I loved my husband, and did my best to make him happy; I also loved my child, loved her with all my heart, and I love her now--not with the passion of a young mother and a widow, but still with all the love of my heart."

The Doctor ceased to scrape the stick as he heard those words, which were uttered with honest warmth, and looking up, found that the powdered and painted lady's lips were twitching, and her eyes wet with standing tears.

"I hope your daughter deserves your love, madam," he said kindly.

"It is impossible not to love her, Doctor, for she is not only good and affectionate, but also clever and beautiful; and I assure you, has a precious fine air."

The Doctor turned again to his former occupation, with no other expression on his face than that of attention to the careful shaving of his little stick.

"You are straying from the subject, somewhat," he said quietly. "Let us return to the time when your husband

"I found myself, at his death, in the possession of ten thousand pounds. Thinking of my child's future, I determined to put this sum in the public funds, to retire from society, and live within the income yielded by the interest on my money. With three hundred pounds per annum I have lived comfortably in my seclusion, and given my daughter a good education."

"I never dreamt a woman could be so reasonable," thought Doctor Blandly.

"Her education is now completed, and the time has arrived for realising the purpose with which I left society, and which has encouraged me for so long to support the dullness and solitude of my life. I am about to re-enter society, and introduce my daughter to the world of fashion and elegant society." "A fool, and no better than the rest after all," said the Doctor to himself with a vicious cut at the stick. "I am aware that to take a genteel house in the West-end, and live in polite style, more than three hundred a year is requisite."

The Doctor responded with a nod of satisfaction.

"Rents and living have gone up so of late years, that I doubt if we could make any appearance under six hundred a year, and if one kept a coach, it would mount to eight hundred. Now, Sir, you know the position in which I stand, and why I am so anxious for your advice."

"Do you wish me to advise you for the happiness of your daughter and your own welfare?"

"Yes, Doctor Blandly."

Still trimming his stick, Doctor Blandly replied:

"My advice is, madam, that you continue to live within the income arising from your invested capital. Have nothing to do with fashionable society, and content yourself with a good, stout-sprunged pony-chaise."

"You misunderstand me, Sir, I wish to know how to live at the rate of eight hundred a year with a capital of ten thousand. For I have already decided upon living in London, and nothing can move me from my decision."

"The answer to the question is very simple—cut your ten thousand pounds into twelve pieces, and spend one piece every

year until all is gone."

"But what am I to do after that?"

"Regret that you did not accept my first advice."

Mrs. St. Cyr waited a few moments while Doctor Blandly, unmoved, patiently scraped away at his seed marker, then she said :

"Is it not possible to buy an annuity with my money?"

"Yes. What sort of an annuity have you been thinking about?"

"An annuity terminable with my life."

"What advantages, in your mind, has an annuity over the simple plan of taking as much as you require until you die or your capital is used up? The individual paying an annuity always calculates to gain by it."

"But all whom I have known have been disappointed."

"Hum! Then you fancy you would get the best of the bargain."

"Yes, for I am certain I shall live to be an old woman. I feel as young as ever I felt; but I should not tell every one so—and people paying an annuity are influenced by hope, and think their annuitants haven't ten years to live."

Doctor Blandly looked up with half-closed, critical eyes at Mrs. St. Cyr, shut up his knife, put the stick into his pocket and asked quietly:

"How old are you?"

After a little hesitation, Mrs. St. Cyr replied:

"Forty-four."

"You are too stout. Do you suffer inconvenience from your stoutness?"

"No. Of course if I run up-stairs quickly, or over-exert myself, I feel it—then I have the palpitations."

Doctor Blandly never took his eyes from her face as she spoke.

"If I told you, madam, that you are likely to die suddenly—that you might not live twelve months, would that deter you from your scheme?"

"Not at all. On the contrary: if you could impress that on any one wishing to sell an annuity, I should have a greater inducement in buying one, as I should get more for my money."

"You told me that you still loved your daughter; how is that consistent with your making an arrangement which will leave her penniless at your death?"

"When I die my daughter will be well married, and in no need of my money."

"Is your daughter engaged?"

"Well—that is—not precisely."

Doctor Blandly was silent for a time, then:

"If I understand your character at all, Mrs. Brown, you wish to go into fashionable society in order that your daughter may secure a husband with a fortune: for this end you are ready to risk the loss of your whole fortune, and expose your daughter to the peril of absolute poverty."

"I see no risk."

"That is to say you are blind. But I trust for your daughter's sake you are not so perversely obstinate that you will not refuse to be led."

"Doctor Blandly, no one in the world can divert me from my intention of taking my daughter into society. It has been my constant solace in the weary solitude of these past years. It is now my proudest hope to see my child married and in a station worthy of her beauty and goodness. She shall not endure what I for her sake have endured."

"Then, madam, accept my present proposition. Draw from your capital as much as is necessary for this speculation; your daughter may marry before your decease: if not, she may have something left of your fortune to support her when you are gone."

"I will never be a burden on my daughter's generosity—never expose to the world the fact that her mother is not what she seemed."

"You oblige me to speak plainly. You will not live to be forty-five."

If the Doctor expected to terrify the widow by his brusque statement, and check her in a course which he saw might be ruinous to her child, he was mistaken. Mrs. St. Cyr smiled calmly and shook her head.

"I know better," she said.

"Ah!" muttered the Doctor. "Here is a type of woman I have seen before. Your fair, fat fool, complacent and self-satisfied, is as obstinately stubborn as a veritable pig."

Mrs. St. Cyr, on her side, was equally aggravated by the opposition of Doctor Blandly, which she conceived arose solely from his antipathy to women and natural perversity. She spoke tartly when next she opened her lips.

"I don't want to know what I am to do with my money. I want you to tell me how I am to obtain an annuity. And perhaps as you seem to think it will be such a losing bargain for me——" she paused.

"I know what you would say, madam. But I can assure you I have no taste for such commerce, and never hope to wish for the death of the meanest of God's creatures."

Mrs. St. Cyr rose hastily, as if to terminate the fruitless in-

terview. Doctor Blandly calmly crossed his legs, set his elbow on the arm of his chair, rested his nose against his forefinger, and closing one eye looked thoughtfully at the floor with the other.

"There are scores of men," said he, as if talking to himself rather than to Mrs. St. Cyr, "scores of 'em who would jump at you and your ten thousand pounds, as a jack jump at a gudgeon. With the doctor's certificate before them they would let you have what you want for your money: without a certificate dozens would take your money and promise you your annuity. Dozens of 'em would rob you—fleece you—turn you inside out and show you your folly for the mere asking. The scoundrels believe they are justified in robbing fools. But you must be saved from such a punishment as that."

Mrs. St. Cyr listened, and her indignation gave way to alarm. She looked at Doctor Blandly, and waited silently for him to end his cogitation and speak.

"Hum!" said he at length, raising his head and turning to Mrs. St. Cyr, without the slightest sign of ill-feeling or good feeling in his expression. "Madam, I know several dealers—professional dealers in annuities, who would satisfy your demands with little question; but I know none whom I would trust. For myself I am content to live without anxiety, and hope never more to receive a penny-piece at another's cost; but I am frequently desired to show a good investment to people who, like yourself, fancy I may be of service to them. If I see a means of providing you with an annuity upon terms which I consider just and worthy, I will do my best to negotiate for you."

"Oh, Doctor Blandly, I did not expect this kindness from you."

"It is not kindness; common humanity will not suffer a man to see a snail crushed if he can help it," answered Doctor Blandly.

CHAPTER XII.

COUNSELS.

"I HOPE your interview has been satisfactory," said Tom, as he conducted Mrs. St. Cyr to the chaise.

"Yes, Mr. Talbot; Doctor Blandly has promised to assist me. That is especially satisfactory, because I feel perfectly

certain that whatever he does in my behalf must be absolutely disinterested—disinterested humanity on his part."

Tom felt inclined to smile; it was so clear that the Doctor had disclaimed any feeling of kindness towards the widow.

"It is difficult at first to know how to conduct oneself with Doctor Blandly," pursued Mrs. Cyr, "but when one gets accustomed to his—his original manner one cannot feel anything but respect for him, and confidence in his judgment."

"The better you know him the more you must admire him."

"As you see, I am not yet composed; indeed, I feel agitated to the last degree. Doctor Blandly has warned me of a great danger from which I should scarcely have escaped but for him. I cannot tell you how deeply grateful I am to you for the introduction, for not only my welfare is concerned, but that also of my dear child. You will give me the opportunity of thanking you in a more elegant style I hope soon. Shall we have the happiness of seeing you to-night?"

"I shall stay with Doctor Blandly until to-morrow, then. I shall give myself the pleasure of visiting you. I have promised to procure a pair of skates for Lady Betty."

"We shall be enchanted to see you, and desolate until you come," said Mrs. St. Cyr, with a gracious bow, as the chaise moved on.

Doctor Blandly hastily changed his working costume, and in his best wig and plum-coloured coat stood at the door to receive Tom when he returned to the house.

"You have got rid of her, my boy," he asked.

"She is gone, Sir."

"That's a mercy. How long have you known her, Tom?"

"Since yesterday."

"Yesterday! and she had the audacity to speak of you as a dear friend, and the impudence to express pity for the Admiral! Well, she has one excuse, and that is scarcely sufficient—she is a fool, a downright fool, and an obstinate fool, and an ill-scented fool, too. If I had only known she was but an acquaintance, and not a dear friend, Tom, I'd be hanged if—"

Doctor Blandly paused.

"You would have refused to help her?"

"I won't say that, my boy, for these fools are to be pitied, Heaven help them! but it is hard that a man seeking peace and quiet can't get two minutes to himself. I shall have to see that woman again, more than once, perhaps. I had a kind of presentiment when I was shaving this morning that I ought to go for a day's fishing."

"And you stayed at home expecting me?"

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"That's it. However, you shall pay for it. We will have dinner as soon as the light fades, and a clean hearth and the cribbage-board after. I will send round for Baxter, and he shan't go home till his wife comes for him. Now, my boy, lunch is waiting, and old Jerry is coming with the bottles."

"Here am I, master," said Jerry, coming up from the cellar with a basket which he carried as though it were of egg shell china.

"What have you got there, Jerry, port?"

"Yes; two on 'em for you and two for Master Tom, to begin with, and I'll go down for the Madeira as soon as I've got these safe out of my hands."

"I told you claret for lunch, you obstinate old man," said the Doctor.

"All in good time, Master; the port won't be a bit too warm by when it's wanted. They are out of that dark corner on the right hand, Master Tom, and you know I don't go there for every one. Lord, how you will enjoy yourselves presently, to be sure! Why, Master Thomas, you look more of a man than ever."

"There, go along, you old chatterer," said the Doctor, "and when you've brought up what wine you think fit to make us drink, lock the gate and tie up the bell."

"I'll do that first," said Jerry, in a serious tone.

"And don't you hear any one calling or knocking until you see Baxter's red nose shining over the top of the gate."

"If Baxter is coming I shall have to bring up twice as much port, but he shall have his own bottles, and they won't come from the dark corner. That parson would drink new port and not know the difference when he's playing cribbage."

Doctor Blandly laughed heartily at his servant's observation, and sat down to the table, which was bountifully covered with fish, flesh, and game.

It was not till the substantial meal was finished, and the two gentleman had turned their chairs to the fire, that the Doctor could bring himself to speak with gravity upon any subject.

"Well, now," said he, when Jerry having arranged the sand bags in the windows, and placed the coal scuttle close to his master's hand, had withdrawn. "Now, my boy, let us talk about your affairs."

Tom was silent; his thoughts naturally reverting to his father—the gallant old gentleman whom he had seen so seldom; and of whom he knew so little. The Doctor's thoughts turned also in the same direction, and he recalled his friend as

he remembered him long ago, a gay, lively boy and fellow scholar. With a sigh and a quick movement of his head, he banished these reflections, and returned to the subject that had to be discussed.

"His will is there," said Doctor Blandly, taking a folded sheet of parchment from his pocket and laying it upon the table. "You will take it with you and read it at your pleasure, Tom. It is simple and clear. Excepting a few unimportant legacies your father has left all to you without restraint or stipulation, as I told you in my letter."

"Is there no one to share it with me?"

"No one. Your mother died at your birth, and I never knew of any relations either on her side or your father's who have any claim to participation. The lawyers have had the will in hand, and your signature alone is wanting to finish the formalities. Virtually, you are now in possession of the Kent estate, and property yielding nigh upon three thousand a year. I have visited Talbot Hall. You have a very good steward: his accounts are quite correct. The Hall itself stands in need of repairs—an expense which must be undertaken under any circumstances. The rest of the property is safely invested, and all you have to settle is—what will you do with it?"

That question has been continually in my mind since I received your letter, and I am prepared with an answer to it now. I must follow in my father's footsteps, and be guided by you, if you will let me tax your kindness."

"Don't talk nonsense, Tom. You know that I should break my heart if you ceased to accept my services. Are you tired of travel?"

"No, I prefer it to staying in one place."

"Good. You have to live another score of years before you can content yourself with a world bounded by four brick walls. Unfortunately a man cannot begin to enjoy his bachelor estate in its fullest comfort until he is fifty. He has to acquire sufficient wisdom. So you will travel again?"

"I have thought so."

"You can't do better. A young man with a decent appearance, an amiable condition, and money, is never safe. A designing woman can flatter him into the belief that she loves him better than any one else, and he is betrayed by the generosity of his nature into offering her marriage. Then he is lost—made over hand and foot to the Philistines. I would have every boy made to learn the history of Sampson by heart. Thanks to your natural taste for never staying in one place longer than half a day, you stand a good chance of being happy

in your declining years. Of course, you have no intention of marrying?"

"None."

"And you do not feel disposed to live at Talbot Hall?"

"No."

"Then my advice is, that as soon as you get tired of my port, you shall go abroad again."

Tom looked at the fire dreamily, without answering. He scarcely heeded what the Doctor was saying at that moment, for his hand, which had slipped into his pocket, rested on a shoe—the shoe Lady Betty had taken from her foot for his guide in the purchase of skates, and he was thinking of the winsome maid. Doctor Blandly looked at him, and saw a smile play about his lips, and a soft tenderness in his eyes, which alarmed him.

"Hum! and where do you think of going next, my boy?" he asked briskly.

"I have not the slightest notion," Tom answered, arousing himself. "I did think of going to South America, but I have changed my mind. Somehow I seem to have lost my relish for new places, and the old—well, the best of the old is here, Doctor. Perhaps, after all, I shall stay a few months in England."

"What is that you keep turning over in your pocket?"

"A maid's shoe," answered Tom, drawing it out and looking at it with admiring eyes—"isn't it pretty?"

The Doctor took it in his hands, turned it over, and fiercely said:

"I'll be hanged if I think it a jot better looking than mine."

"I cannot agree with you," said Tom, laughing, as he slipped the shoe gently back into his pocket.

"That woman said she had a daughter; now I'll wager the shoe's hers."

"You win; it is."

"Ah! I thought so; a chip of the old block. Pretty of course, and a fool."

"On the contrary, I think she is clever."

"So much the worse—Baxter's wife's clever."

Tom laughed.

"There the comparison ends," said he.

"Tom, I don't like it. The mother is designing, and has been pretty enough, and if the girl has as much cunning and more prettiness, she will just marry you for your money, if you give her the chance. My boy, it is more necessary than ever

that you should go to South America - to Jericho - anywhere, that you may be safe from a clever, pretty girl, whose very shoe-leather makes you forget that you are a man and a bachelor."

Tom thought a moment, then emptying his glass, he cried in a reckless spirit:

"Well, perhaps it will be wise. And what am I to do with all my money—that has yet to be settled."

"I can manage that for you, as I managed it for your father. I will let you know when you overdraw your income and trespass upon capital."

"No fear of that. My expenses will not increase. The money can accumulate, and when the time comes for me to write my last will and testament, I can settle it all on a charity."

"What could be better?" asked Doctor Bland.

Perhaps Tom was thinking it might be better to leave it to one's own children than those of others, for he said somewhat sadly:

"And the Hall—one can't sell a house that has descended from father to son for a couple of hundred years."

"It may stand as a monument to their memory, my boy."

Tom nodded his head in thoughtful silence.

"And now I have to speak on another matter," said the Doctor, altering his amiable tone of voice and speaking with cold precision. "It is a subject which is new to you, and one that is unpleasant to broach; but it must nevertheless be discussed. Give me your close attention for a few minutes. During the later part of his life, your father paid an annual sum of four hundred pounds to two individuals—two hundred to each. It was entirely an act of generosity on his part. He never mentioned the fact to you—he wished you not to know these individuals or their history. They themselves are ignorant of the source from which this annual payment arises. With the Admiral's death this payment naturally terminates, for they have no place in his will. He could not mention them, for that would have betrayed, or led to the betrayal of a secret which for your own peace of mind he wished you not to know. Nevertheless, I believe he would have you continue to make this small yearly allowance at my discretion. He might have simplified the matter by leaving me a sum to discharge this payment; but he had some forced notion of delicacy in doing that."

"Which I fully participate. It would be an ungenerous return for your kindness to make you appear his debtor."

"My boy, what on earth does it matter how we appear to others? We do our duty, we satisfy our own conscience, we sleep o' nights, and it matters nothing how we appear. We are not women."

"I do not wish to discover my father's secret," said Tom, after a few minutes' reflection; "but I should be glad to know if the amount paid to these two persons is sufficient for their wants. I would willingly double it."

"There is no necessity. One of them would not be satisfied with all your money, and I am sometimes inclined to stop his allowance altogether; the other is not in need of any assistance. Give them two hundred a year a-piece if you will, but give them no more."

"Be it so. And you will let me leave the disposition of my property in your hands to invest as you will, and take that difficulty off my hands?"

"Willingly."

Tom held out his hand, and pressed Doctor Blandly's in silent acknowledgment of his gratitude.

"One word to conclude that subject," said the Doctor, holding the young man's hand; "I shall write to the lawyers to-morrow morning, and they in answer will fix a day for you to attend at Lincoln's Inn. I will bid them name a day as early as possible. Then your signatures being made, nothing need delay your departure. Until that time you will be my guest, will you not?"

"I have promised to visit Mrs. St. Cyr."

"Ah, I had forgotten that shoe. Well, well—return it as quickly as possible, and have no more to do with those designing persons than is absolutely necessary. Mark me—nothing good can come to you from that acquaintance. And now let us talk of something more agreeable."

They chatted without interruption, until old Jerry on half entering the room said:

"Are you disengaged, master?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I don't wish to trouble you, Sir. I can come again in five or ten minutes."

"What do you want to say?"

"It's only the parson. He's kicking at the gate. You can see him from the window."

"Open the gate once; and look here, Jerry, my man, you will do well to have a little more respect for my visitors. If I was the parson, I'd never give you another sixpence."

"Lord love you, master," answered Jerry, lingering at the

door, "I wonder who'd help him over the garden-wall when Mrs. Baxter comes to the garden-gate for him if I was to forsake him in his hour of need. Hark to him, master!"

"Open the gate at once, you old fool! Don't stand there grinning and rubbing your hands."

The Reverend Mr. Baxter, standing on tiptoe, whistled and knocked alternately to attract attention. From the window Tom could see his two hands clutching the top, and half of his jolly red face shining above it.

CHAPTER XIII.

PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS.

It was with satisfaction that Tom Talbot found ice in the river when he rose the following morning. If the frost had broken he would not have been called upon to teach Lady Betty to skate, and nothing might have taken place to prevent his following the counsel of Doctor Blandly. Scraping the frost from the window, and looking over the gently undulating English landscape, where every twig and branch stood out sharp and distinct against the still, cold sky; he had less desire than ever for the expansive grandeur and fervid mists of South America. Solitude had lost its sublimity—or sublimity its charms for him.

After breakfast he took the stage to London. He bought a pair of strong, useful skates for himself at the first shop he came to, but he found nothing sufficiently light and pretty for Lady Betty until he had examined the stock of half a dozen shops. It was half-past two when he reached the Chesnuts.

Lady Betty must have seen him coming, for the door opened before he reached it, and she ran to meet him, her open face aglow with sparkling delight. Suddenly she checked herself, seeming to remember that she was no longer a child, and waited for him to approach with a blush upon her cheek and eyes that sought now the ground, now his face, in pretty bashfulness.

"You are glad to see me?" Tom said, looking in her face.

"Yes; and are not you glad to see me also?"

Tom did not answer; his tongue seemed to refuse its office.

"Are you afraid to flatter me?" asked she.

"Lady Betty," said he, "I know not how it comes that I am silent when I so wish to speak, unless it be that there are no words to express my happiness."

With a little cry of gratification Lady Betty slipped her hand under Tom's arm, and her step seemed to gain in elasticity.

"It is a new happiness to be so welcomed."

"Mamma says that Doctor Blandly was prodigiously glad to see you."

"Hum! why that's true," said Tom, with some hesitation; then, looking sideways at Lady Betty's face to see what there was in it which should make her greeting so much more effective than Dr. Blandly's, he added, "but your welcome is not the same as his, and you are not in the least like him."

"I am very glad of it if mamma's description of him is exact—she says he looks like an hostler and speaks like a bear," said Lady Betty, laughing.

At this moment they came to the door, where mamma stood prepared to receive him—all smiles and feathers.

"My dear Mr. Talbot, I am so overjoyed to see you. I hope you are quite well—and that dear old Doctor Blandly. I protest I am quite infatuated with him—his manly, straightforward way of speaking, and his honest English face, are ever present in my memory."

Lady Betty withdrew behind her mamma to hide her mirth, and put her finger on her lips as a signal of silence to Tom.

"Doctor Blandly is quite well," said Tom, "and he begged me to say that you need not trouble yourself to call upon him as he intends writing to you in the course of the day."

"It will be no trouble, but, on the contrary, a pleasure."

"I am afraid you would be disappointed if you went with the hope of seeing him, the—the bell is out of order, and—and when the Doctor is working in the garden he invariably—that is, he will invariably have the front gate locked."

"Ah, he is a little shy at present, but I daresay that will wear off after we have exchanged a few letters."

Not to flatter Mrs. St. Cyr with delusive hopes, Tom asked Lady Betty if she would take her first skating lesson before the light faded. Lady Betty wished for nothing better.

A man must have his wits about him to nicely adjust a skate on the small surface of a pretty girl's foot. Tom's wits deserted him from the moment he took Lady Betty's foot in his hand. He felt never more clumsy in his life. He grew warm, his fingers trembled and slipped, grazing his knuckles against the sharp steel; he twisted the straps, and buckled them first too loose, then too tight; in a word, his bungling efforts were sufficient to tire one's patience, yet Lady Betty only laughed. She seemed to enjoy his confusion; she did not find fault or

attempt to help him, though it was perfectly clear that she could have done the whole business for herself in a couple of minutes. It inspired her with delightful hopes of conquest, to have him kneeling at her feet, for she was a tyrant at heart. And what man could she prefer for her slave to one who had vaunted his independence, and talked lightly of leaving her.

As for Tom, he felt he was no longer master of himself from the moment he bent his knee; but he took on his chains readily, not knowing how soon they would gall him.

"Thank you," said Lady Betty, when he had finished buckling on her skates, and proceeded to strap on his own: "my feet have given you a great deal of trouble."

"'Tis my faulty hand that gives me trouble, and not your foot—that is faultless."

"So I have been told," said Lady Betty, demurely.

Tom did not answer.

"Now who on earth can have told her so?" he asked himself, giving a vicious tug at his skate straps; "clearly some one whose opinion she values. A woman would not be likely to tell her of her perfections. It must have been a man, and as she hasn't any relations, who the deuce has a right to pass remarks upon her feet?"

Women are quick to make deductions from the slightest actions of men in whom they take interest. Lady Betty drew her own conclusions from Tom's silence and that intemperate pull at his skate-straps. Had he looked up at that moment he would have seen mischief sparkling in her pretty eyes.

"I could make him wretchedly jealous if I chose," thought Lady Betty. The thought, however, was transitory, for she was eager to learn, and as Tom rose to his feet he found nothing but sweet expectancy in her face, and under the influence of her smile his brow grew smooth again.

"Give me your left hand, Lady Betty," he said, "now your right."

"What great, strong hands you have!"

"The better for serving you. Keep your arms firm. Your left foot forward, now your right, left—not too fast, left again—so!"

Lady Betty required little teaching, she was fearless and quick, and following Tom's movements, she got on rapidly. After a time, Mrs. St. Cyr came to the edge of the pond and regarded her daughter's movements with proud satisfaction.

"There, mamma, what do you think of that?" asked Lady Betty, when Tom led her up to Mrs. St. Cyr.

"Prodigious, my love!" answered Mrs. St. Cyr. "The

grace and the elegance are astonishing, and I am not in the least surprised that the skating has become a fashionable pastime. I hear, Mr. Talbot, that the Prince has performed the cotillions in company with the Duchess of Donegal, and Mrs. FitzHerbert, upon the waters at Windsor."

"Very likely, madam, I have seen women, carrying baskets of butter on their heads, skate to market in the low countries," answered Tom.

"Take me away again," cried Lady Betty, impatient of delay, "the sun is already behind the trees."

Mrs. St. Cyr stood on the bank, watching the skaters until her feet were numb, and she had reason to fear that the end of her nose was growing vulgarly red, when she waved an adieu and returned to the house, leaving the young people to follow by themselves—an arrangement which agreed well with their inclinations.

"Am I a good pupil?" asked Lady Betty, when the dark compelled them to leave the ice, and Tom was removing her skates.

"You are too apt. I fear you will be able to dispense with your teacher too soon."

"You were anxious to leave me, and only undertook to teach me by compulsion, I believe. Have you abandoned your intention of leaving England soon?"

"To tell you the truth, I was never so disinclined to leave it. After another lesson you will be able to skate alone; then I shall have no excuse for staying here."

"Oh! I can supply you with as many excuses as you need. In the first place, I do not want to skate alone—in the second, it would not be safe for me—I should be nervous and timid the moment I felt there was no one to save me if I were in peril."

"You do not seem wanting in courage."

"That is because you mistake my confidence in you for self-reliance. I should never feel afraid while a gentleman was near me."

"I am afraid you flatter our sex unduly. We are not all to be trusted in emergency. In danger women are frequently braver than men."

"I don't think so," Lady Betty said emphatically.

"You judge men by the fictions they have written of their own heroism; I judge by experience."

"So do I," said Lady Betty, drily.

Tom looked at her in surprise and found her with her eyes fixed on the path they were treading, and the delicate lines of her brows bent in a frown.

"There were twenty-one of us," pursued Lady Betty. "Some girls of my own age, others older, and three governesses, as old and as tough as—as Oliver Cromwell; regular Ironsides all three. We were out taking the air, and had to cross the river by one of the lock gates. There were two boards and an iron rail. We were told to hold the rail in crossing with both hands—and that was just sufficient to make me not hold it at all, as there happened to be a gentleman on the bank looking at us. And I tripped over a horrid nail, and fell in.

"The young girls cried, the elder hid their faces in their hands, and the three governesses fainted away—and I was left in the water to get out by my own efforts or drown. Luckily Philip Norman saved me. And so, Mr. Talbot, I think my experience proves by twenty to one, that female courage is less reliable than you think it."

"Philip Norman was the name of the fellow on the bank who looked at you as you were crossing, I suppose?"

"It was!" answered Lady Betty, in a grave voice, casting a rapid glance at Tom's sombre face. "And I shall never forget him," she added, bending her head to conceal the merry twinkling mischief of her eyes.

"Lucky rascal," muttered Tom. "Well, of course, the girls couldn't swim; and if there was a man there he was compelled, in common decency, to plunge in and rescue you."

"Yes," Lady Betty said, with a soft sigh.

"He would have deserved a thrashing if he had not."

From Tom's tone of voice it seemed as if he thought Philip Norman ought to have a thrashing all the same for having done his duty. Lady Betty, who felt as if she were being tickled in church, had the utmost difficulty to keep a grave face. She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and sighed again.

"He did not lose his life in saving yours, did he?" Tom asked, remarking this sign of grief.

Lady Betty shook her head in silence, and turned her face aside.

"Then hang him!" said Tom, to himself. "She knows his name, so it is clear he took advantage of the accident to repay himself for his trouble."

"I haven't seen him for three months," said Lady Betty, her face still averted, and a corner of her handkerchief in her mouth.

"You saw him frequently afterwards, then?"

"Every week," murmured Lady Betty, her shoulders making a convulsive movement which passed well for subdued grief,

but owed its origin to suppressed laughter. Tom's tone increased in moody suspicion with each word.

"You saw him every week—here?" he asked.

"No. Mamma has never seen him."

"A clandestine affair!" said Tom to himself. "It is scandalous the amount of harm that is done to simple girls by the neglect of those to whom they are entrusted by over-confiding parents. Here is some idle vagabond ogling a girls' school, when fortune gives him the opportunity of fishing a girl out of the water. He presumes upon the impression this trivial service has upon her romantic disposition, to contract an acquaintance with her, unknown to her mother. He deserves to be kicked!"

Lady Betty had changed her elastic step for one of sentimental slowness.

Tom broke the silence.

"I suppose this young man, this Philip Norman, has no occupation?"

"He is only a poor artist. But if you please we will change the subject. Let us talk of something more interesting to you."

"No subject can be more interesting than that which concerns Lady Betty's happiness."

Lady Betty made a courtesy, drew a long sigh, put her handkerchief in her pocket, and in a tone of assumed cheerfulness, observed that she thought it would freeze again in the night.

"I am of your opinion," answered Tom, and then relapsing into silence, he said to himself: "An artist. I know the sort of man—waving hair over his shoulders, moustaches and a chin tuft, after the style of Vandyke—a big hat and a ribbon to his breeches. And I'm to take his place and to amuse my Lady Betty until she makes another romantic attachment. Ha! we shall see. Perhaps I'm not such a weak fool as she thinks me. By George, I wish the frost would break, I would be off by the first vessel that leaves the docks!"

"Is it colder than this in Russia?" asked Lady Betty, demurely.

"Yes—considerably."

Silence again, while Tom continued his train of thought. "I would like to see the fellow though, just to tell him what I think of him. A poor innocent, thoughtless child—she is scarcely more! By heaven! I would have him out on the grass if he dared to come within five miles of her after I have warned him off."

"I don't think we shall have snow," observed Lady Betty.

With a struggle Tom brought himself to talk upon meteorology, and they were still exchanging questions and answers on this expansive subject when they reached the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE BEST LAID SCHEMES."

MRS. ST. CYR was in her room reading a letter which had been delivered by old Jerry, with a brief message to the effect that Doctor Blandly did not require an answer.

The letter ran thus :

"Edmonton, December 15th.

"Madam,

"If you are yet minded to invest your money in an annuity, you may take your papers to Mr. Goodman, of Lincoln's Inn, whom I have instructed by letter to-day to pay you the sum of eight hundred pounds per annum during the term of your life, in consideration of receiving the capital which you propose sinking. Proper guarantees being exchanged, you will be entitled to draw your first quarterly payment on the 24th day of this month. This you may do if you will, but I repeat that it is directly opposed to your own interests, as I judge them, and to my advice. Your heirs can claim nothing at your death, even though accident or disease should terminate your existence on the day of signing the contract.

"If you will be guided by reason—live plainly, avoid excitement, and draw what income is necessary for your wants from your capital without investing it unwisely in an annuity.

"I am, Madam,

"Your servant,

"BENJAMIN BLANDLY."

"A very satisfactory letter indeed!" said Mrs. St. Cyr to herself, as she folded the letter after reading it. "It seems too good to be true. Eight hundred a year is at least two more than I expected, and more than I should have been likely to get from any one else.

"I have made a prodigious good bargain for a certainty, thanks to the old gentleman's high opinion of himself and his own judgment. I suppose I looked anxious and pale at our

interview—indeed I felt exceedingly uncomfortable, what with the smoke from his horrid bonfire, his unpleasant behaviour, and the fear that he would discover the scent he objected to was my essence of musk and caromandel. I never had any serious illness. I never felt better in my life than at present, and as to disease—the most objectionable word he could possibly find—it is a preposterous supposition. I am a little stouter than I could wish, but that is because I am, if anything, too robust in health. If I had known that he would grant me an annuity, I should have taken pains to appear more delicate than I feel, an attack of the palpitations in his presence might have procured me another hundred a year. However, I have every reason to be satisfied. With eight hundred a year one can live in a very genteel style.”

Mrs. St. Cyr read the letter through once more, then hearing voices in the room below, she hastily slipped it into a drawer, locked it up carefully, and descended to the drawing-room.

She was too occupied with her own affairs, and elated with the prospect of speedily realising her long cherished hopes, to notice that Tom and Lady Betty were more silent than usual—indeed she allowed them no scope for exercising their conversational powers, for no sooner had she entered the room than she began to speak upon the subject uppermost in her mind, with a volubility which might be likened to a torrent into which side streams naturally flow and lose their individuality.

“Embrace me, my love,” she said to Lady Betty, “embrace me. I have received a most satisfactory letter from Doctor Blandly, and my fondest wishes may be put into execution immediately. Mr. Talbot, you will excuse me for introducing my personal affairs before you; but I am sure you will be interested in that which concerns the welfare of my darling child and myself.”

“Madam, I can assure you I feel——”

“Oh, you have a right to my confidence, for you have been instrumental in producing my felicity, and I regard you as a dear relative and an old friend rather than a new acquaintance. I cannot tell you how highly I appreciate your friendship, but you can understand how deeply grateful I am to Providence that sent you to my assistance, when I tell you that without you my dear child and I might have been utterly ruined.”

“Oh, mamma—ruined!”

“Kiss me, my darling, it is the truth; but for Doctor Blandly’s intervention I should have placed the whole of my fortune and yours in the hands of some one who would have

robbed us. We are singularly placed, Mr. Talbot. I have neither relations nor friends on whose judgment I can rely. My only acquaintances are one or two neighbouring families, composed of women that are perfectly idiotic, and men who are no better. I have lived in a state of isolation while my child has been at school, and we know absolutely no gentlemen—do we, Betty?"

Lady Betty did not reply.

Tom, coming with chivalrous promptitude to her assistance, said:

"I am sure any man so fortunately placed as myself, could do no less than——"

"Mr. Talbot, you have given such proof of disinterested regard for us two unfriended women that it would be unjust for us to place you in the same category with ordinary acquaintances. You are our friend, a dear friend on whose support and guidance I feel that we may rely with confidence in the critical position we shall shortly occupy, and, as a friend I shall claim rather than solicit your assistance."

"But, mamma, you have not asked Mr. Talbot whether——"

Mrs. St. Cyr sealed her daughter's lips with a kiss, and said, in a gentle tone:

"Do not interrupt me, darling. Give me your best attention, my charmer, for this is a subject which closely concerns yourself. The questions I have to put to Mr. Talbot will come in their fitting place. My husband, Mr. Talbot, died while Lady Betty was still an infant. The fortune he left was not large enough to permit of retaining a large establishment, and I had no longer the inclination to live in a grand style.

"I was a young mother and a young widow, and you can well imagine that in my position the only thought I had was for my child. To provide for her future was my first care, and I retired at once to this secluded part. I placed my money in the public funds, drawing only sufficient to provide for my own wants and Lady Betty's education in order that principal and interest should accumulate, so as to allow of her taking a suitable position in society when she left school. Anxious to obtain as large an income as possible, I intended to remove my capital from the bank and place it in the hands of a financial agent, who would invest it to the best advantage.

"You now see the risk to which I should have exposed myself, but for Dr. Blandly. He kindly warned me against the public adventurer, and promised to find, if he could, some pro-

fitable and safe investment. That promise he kept, and this afternoon he writes to inform me that I may rely on receiving eight hundred pounds a year for the use of my capital. I shall accept his offer without hesitation."

"You may do so with perfect confidence," said Tom: "your property in his hands will be as safe as if it were his own. Not only will the interest be promptly paid but the capital, should you wish to withdraw it, will——"

"I am perfectly satisfied," Mrs. St. Cyr said, hastily. "And now, Mr. Talbot, we come to a more interesting part of the subject. I am to receive my first quarterly payment on the ensuing quarter-day."

"That is to say, three months from the present date."

"No: on the twenty-fourth of this month. Is that unusual, Mr. Talbot?"

"I have never known interest on capital to be paid in advance, although I believe payment is occasionally made on annuities, on the day of capital being transferred; but I know little if anything about financial arrangements, and I can quite believe that Doctor Blandly would procure all the advantage for you——"

"Precisely; that undoubtedly accounts for everything. What a dear, good man!" Mrs. St. Cyr gave a deep sigh of satisfaction as this dangerous point was rounded, and proceeded, "I am to conclude the business through Mr. Goodman, of Lincoln's Inn."

"Doctor Blandly's solicitor. I myself am to see him shortly."

"He is a trustworthy man, of course. For although I have no hesitation in telling you my affairs, I should not like them divulged, you understand."

"Mr. Goodman is as discreet as Doctor Blandly himself."

"How charming it is to have to do business with such people! Well, Mr. Talbot, I intend to carry out my purpose without delay. I shall sell this house at once."

"My poor pigeons!" sighed Lady Betty.

"My darling, you are no longer a child. Pigeons are very well in a pasty, or as a side dish."

"Fancy my Maggie as a side dish! I will never eat pigeons again. Go on, mamma. I will bid my pets good-bye to-morrow."

"With the proceeds of the sale one might buy a very elegant chariot and pair—a rich yellow chariot. What do you think, Mr. Talbot?"

"I think it is quite possible, madam."

"With respect to a house. I cut an advertisement from

'The Times' newspaper which I think very appropriate. I have it here in my purse. You are near the light, will you read that and tell me what you think of it."

Tom took the cutting, and read it with some perplexity.

"Will you be good enough to read it aloud for Lady Betty's benefit?" said Mrs. St. Cyr.

"It is pleasing to observe in these enlightened times," Tom read, "that the eulogies of all classes hath been bestowed upon Dr. Solomon's Cordial Balm of Gilead and Elixer of Guaiacum, prepared only at the repertorium, and considered by the faculty as the most soothing——"

Mrs. St. Cyr interrupted him, and with many apologies for her mistake, produced and offered the advertisement she intended for him; he read it aloud while Lady Betty smothered her laughter.

"To be let, from Christmas, a neat house, known as Mr. Johnson's, Park Lane, suitable to a modern genteel family, at a rental of ninety-five pounds per annum."

"That is it. What do you think of Park Lane, Mr Talbot?"

"It is a very agreeable part of London."

"I am delighted with your approval, and if you will be so good as to escort us we will go and see it to-morrow. I hope and trust it may not be taken. I shall want some additions in the way of furniture, but as I am pretty well supplied with china, that will not cost me a great deal. You think I have enough china to appear genteel, Mr. Talbot?"

"Ample," said Tom, and he added to himself, "and enough besides for a genteel museum."

"Well, then, I consider the house in Park Lane as good as taken and furnished, and all that we now want is an agreeable circle of acquaintances—and that, Mr. Talbot, I shall count upon your successful efforts to obtain."

At this moment dinner was announced, and whatever Tom might have had to say in objection to this arrangement, remained unsaid, for Lady Betty, who had a capital appetite, which she was not ashamed of, rose from her seat with a cry of satisfaction as soon as the maid appeared at the door.

In obedience to the dictates of "good breeding," Mrs. St. Cyr gave a general turn to conversation, and allowed it to meander slowly along during the repast, without either hindrance or assistance from herself—her mind still being engrossed in the one great scheme of her life.

The moment they returned to the drawing-room she re-opened the subject with renewed vigour, starting with the assumption that Tom had agreed to give his time to making acquaintances

at the clubs, coffee-houses, and assemblies, whom he would forthwith introduce to the ladies in their new home, the neat house in Park Lane.

Tom would have been dull indeed had he not detected from Mrs. St. Cyr's observations the principal object she had in view, and that did not encourage him to look more favourably at the prospect of a season in London.

"Hum!" said he to himself. "Perhaps I shall be lucky enough to meet with Lady Betty's interesting preserver—the artist she has lost sight of for three months, and when she has him at her feet, and as many suitors besides as I can rake together, I may be permitted to retire from the scene."

Tom's discontent was stimulated by perceiving that his gloom served only to divert Lady Betty. She had seated herself at the table with paper and pencil at the commencement of the evening, and devoted herself to sketching; but more than once when she raised her head their eyes met, and he found a merry twinkle in hers which he knew was not provoked by any mirthfulness in his. His dulness was at length perceived by Mrs. St. Cyr, who taking it as a sign that he would be glad of a little variety, brought her discourse to a conclusion with a sigh.

"My love, what have you been designing?" she asked of Lady Betty.

"A portrait from memory, mamma dear—the portrait of a dear, dear friend."

Tom pricked his ears, for Lady Betty's voice was sad.

"Let me look at it, my sweet one. Lady Betty has great skill with the pencil, and excels in the water-colours—she has taken several prizes, and been highly complimented by her master. Oh, my dear! this is too bad of you—you are really too satiric! Yet 'tis an excellent portrait of the dear old gentleman, I protest. Mr. Talbot, you shall give me your opinion of the production."

The sketch was a spirited caricature of an elderly gentleman in an antiquated costume.

"It is admirably drawn, and very droll," said Tom. "Do I understand that it is the portrait of a friend?"

"The portrait of her own drawing-master—the brother of the ladies at whose school Lady Betty has received her education. But he is something more to her than a teacher, for when she was quite a child he saved her from drowning."

"With a boat-hook!" exclaimed Lady Betty, clasping her hands in mock emotion.

"And his name is Philip Norman. I trust, my love, he has got better of the lumbago."

"What a fool I have been!" said Tom to himself. Then his spirits revived; he became gay, and spoke of the coming events in London with positive enthusiasm.

When they separated for the night—Mrs. St. Cyr being occupied in trimming the wick of the candle for Tom's use—Lady Betty gave her hand to him, and said in a low voice and with an arch smile:

"You will never be jealous again?"

And he answered, "Never;" snatching her finger tips to his lips, and pressing a silent kiss upon them, while his very soul seemed to flame in his eyes.

Never! What solemn word is more lightly used?

CHAPTER XV.

THE ESTABLISHMENT IN PARK LANE.

"My love!" said Mrs. St. Cyr to Lady Betty, as she sat surrounded by her china in the drawing-room of the neat house in Park Lane, "I must admit that I am greatly disappointed in Mr. Talbot."

"Why, mamma? He has not altered."

"That is precisely my reason for feeling disappointment. Except that he has had his hair cut in accordance with the fashion, he is not a pin better than he was the first day we saw him. He dresses as plainly as a Quaker, and he absolutely laughs at the Prince of Wales. Now what sort of society is likely to be introduced to us by a man who makes a mock of the finest gentleman in Europe?"

"He has introduced us to all the friends he knows in London."

"And we should have been quite as well without them. Two of them were bearded like savages, a third cou^d talk of nothing but the wild beasts he had shot in foreign parts, a fourth wore a coat that was threadbare, and their main object seemed to be to eat as much as possible at dinner, and make fun of the aristocracy. I declare Mr. Talbot seems to draw his friends from the meanest classes of society, and I consider he is wanting in respect to bring such men here at all."

"He only did it to oblige you; he appears ill at ease the whole time they are with us."

"It is as much on their account as ours."

"Possibly. But he warned us that his friends were unused

to ladies' society. You have one consolation, mamma—from the evident satisfaction these gentlemen had in bidding us adieu, it was clear that they intended never to trouble us again with their society."

"'Tis extremely provoking. Here have we been in London a month, with one of the handsomest chariots in the West End, a servant in livery, a home furnished at an expense which I should have considered it impossible to incur, spent all our available money and got into debt besides, and haven't seen a man that's worth more than eighty pounds a year."

"You forget Mr. Talbot, whom we see every day."

"My love, we did not go to all this expense for him. In my opinion, you might have made him engage himself to you before ever we left Winchmore."

"It is not too late now, mamma, perhaps."

"There is no doubt he would marry you to-morrow, if you encouraged him, but you know that I have more expanded views. I would have you marry a title, my love—with money of course, and it is for that purpose alone I came to London, and undertook all these terrible expenses. Why do you shake your head, my dear?"

"Because I think you are not quite truthful in saying that."

"I admit I anticipated certain pleasures for myself—but what have we found? What enjoyment is there in riding about in our chariot when there is not a soul to bow to?"

"I find enjoyment in looking about me—in seeing people and rich dresses—in feeling the fresh air—in the rapid motion—in everything."

"That is the fault of youth—when you get my age——"

"I hope I shall be just as faulty," said Lady Betty, concluding Mrs. St. Cyr's sentence, and laughing cheerfully.

"'Tis no better at the playhouse," continued Mrs. St. Cyr, still in a tone of discontent. "What is the use of a side-box? I protest we should be as well off in the pit."

"Better for seeing, I think."

"People who can afford the side boxes don't go to the play to see so much as to be seen; to run in and out of each other's boxes, banging the doors to attract attention."

"I never enjoyed anything more than 'The Road to Ruin.'"

"And I never anything less. A comedy they called it. It might have been the most doleful tragedy for any amusement I could find in it. I felt perfectly wretched to see every one laughing, staring at each other, and nodding at friends. When people spy at us through their glasses, 'tis with a kind of who-

the-Dickens-can-that-be look on their faces, and no one even bowed to us, except one of Mr. Talbot's bearded savages in the back row of the pit; a fine compliment indeed—and I with feathers on my head that cost twelve pounds."

"Perhaps he would not have bowed, if they had not attracted his observation."

"That is not what we are talking about. I repeat I have reason to be disappointed in Mr. Talbot. I am sure I miss no opportunity of hinting my wishes to him, but he takes no notice. He will *not* be gay and spirited."

Mrs. St. Cyr fanned herself in silence for a minute, then continued:

"A gentleman with money can always make friends. If he would only go into some of the card-rooms—Brooks' or White's—he would find many fine gentlemen only too glad to make his acquaintance."

"Gentlemen seeking his acquaintance because he has money, would do so chiefly because they have none; and they are not the kind of gentlemen you wish to know."

"There you are in error. These fine gentlemen without money are bound to know fine gentlemen with money, or they could not live at all; and when they cannot afford to pay for a dinner to their rich friends, they are only too glad to take them to dine at somebody else's expense. And that is how your fine gentleman without money makes himself useful, and contrives to keep himself in favour with all parties."

Lady Betty laughed.

"I see nothing to laugh at, my love. As I have said—all I can do by hinting I have done without effect; and I think you now ought to suggest in a pleasant manner to Mr. Talbot, that you would like him to go to the card-rooms and—
and—"

"Lose his money in making friends to be his rivals—hey, mamma? Well, I will—that is he knocking at the door now—I will ask him when he comes in."

"Then for Heaven's sake let me get out of the room as quickly as possible!" cried Mrs. St. Cyr, starting up from her seat in alarm.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM PROPOSES—LADY BETTY DISPOSES.

LADY BETTY was tambouring, she continued working with a grave expression on her young face until the door opened and

Tom Talbot entered the room; then she raised her head, stuck her needle in the canvas, and holding out her hand, welcomed the friend with a smile.

"Come and sit beside me. I have something to say to you. Mamma and I have been talking about you. She has this moment left the room."

Tom seated himself on the sofa by her side, while she, taking her needle again, resumed her work.

"Do you know mamma's motive in coming to London—in spending more than she can afford—in keeping a yellow chariot, and selling my poor pigeons?" she asked, when Tom after making a few conventional remarks, waited for her to speak.

"I believe I do," he replied.

"She wishes me to marry well."

"No one knowing you could wish anything else than that, Lady Betty."

"The difficulty is to find a suitable husband for me. The friends she knew fourteen years ago are dispersed and lost. She knows no one except the gentlemen you have introduced, and they are not altogether satisfactory—from her point of view."

"Her point of view may not be yours, and it is you who are chiefly to be considered."

"I may not agree with mamma on all points, but I am quite at one with her in regarding your friends as unmarriageable. Is there any one of them whom you would have tried to make my husband?"

"No; but I would not willingly give your hand to the noblest, worthiest man in the world, though he were my dearest friend."

A smile stole over Lady Betty's face as she leaned over her tambour.

"Mamma wishes you to go to one of the card clubs and find me a husband there."

"Does Mrs. St. Cyr take me for a perfect fool?" asked Tom, with a laugh.

Lady Betty made no reply, but worked on steadily.

"It is odd," continued Tom; "I was at White's last night, and lost fifty guineas to the prettiest gentleman in the room. A charming man—handsome, polite, refined, and becoming the dress of a gentleman so well as to force one to admiration. I never lost my money so willingly in my life, and when we parted I begged him to exchange cards that we might meet again under more amiable conditions."

"Do you intend to see him a second time?" asked Lady Betty, looking up from her work.

"I have seen him a second time. I sought him this morning, so much had he fascinated me. We walked together in the park, and separated—ten minutes since, and not a hundred yards from this house."

Lady Betty returned to her embroidery, and worked in silent thoughtfulness.

"He is exactly the kind of man your mamma is continually talking to me about, the sort of man she would make you marry if she could, and for that reason I did not ask him to come with me here."

"That was ungenerous," Lady Betty said, calmly.

"It is ungenerous, selfish, mean—what you will," he cried; "say that withal I lose my self-esteem—what then? A man will sacrifice more than that to possess a diamond, and if he will sacrifice so much for a mere stone that has its value in so many pounds, shillings and pence, shall I hesitate at losing so little to gain that which is above all price!"

He took her hand from the frame and pushed the tambour away, and she, awed by the earnestness with which he spoke, and the passion which burned in his eye and trembled on his lips, looked with large-eyed wonder in his pale face.

"I have thought of you day and night," he continued, "and tried not to think. I have left this house saying, 'I will return no more,' and ere the night had come counted the hours until morning, impatient to see you again. I have said, 'I will not love,' and I love."

"You frighten me, and you are crushing my hand."

"I am not master of myself," he said, relaxing his close grasp, yet retaining her hand between his palms with a gentleness that corresponded to the tender tone to which his voice sank; "I did not intend to say what I have said; 'tis my heart and not my brain that governs my will."

"Would you unsay your words?"

"Not for the world," he cried, quickly; "I say again—I love you, dear."

He did not fall upon his knee, he did not attempt to kiss her, for there was no blush upon Lady Betty's cheek, no bashful yielding of her eyes, to show a responding love. Lady Betty was struggling to overcome her astonishment, and look at the situation in a clear and reasonable manner.

"Say something to me, dear; do not look at me in such chilling silence."

"I do not understand; I am still confused," said Lady Betty,

touched by the sadness of Tom's voice, and the piteous supplication in his eyes as he looked upon her blank face. "Tell me why you wished to leave me if you loved me, and why, loving me, you wished not to love me."

"It was because I feared I could not make you happy, the end of loving being marriage and life-long union. Our tastes, I saw, were at variance. The whirl of life and fashion that you sigh to gain I thought I might sigh to quit."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Betty, her eyes quickening with intelligent light.

"But that is a trifle. I can conform my tastes with yours, make your pleasures mine; follow the world from London to Cheltenham, Cheltenham to Bath, and dress myself, if you will, in any extravagance that fashion invents. What will that matter if I love?"

Lady Betty looked at Tom no longer with astonishment or coldness in her eyes, but in kind compassion and tender sympathy; yet he dared not take her in his arms.

"Tom," she said, after a moment's silence, and she spoke with frank freedom, "Tom, I love you better than any one in the world, and so I will not conceal a single thought from you. You have made a woman of me, and in a few words taught me to look at the great event of a woman's life seriously, as one should look at it. I have talked of marriage as a school-girl and a child, with no thought for the time when the orange-blossom fades."

She felt the two strong hands trembling above and below her fingers; she took her disengaged hand and laid it upon the back of his.

"I have said I love you better than any one in the world—that may be no flattery to you," she said with brief return to her customary tone of badinage; "for you have taken pains to show me only your least attractive friends, but I do not love as you love. I forget you frequently, and if I do foolish or ungenerous things it is not for your sake. 'Tis gratitude more than anything that animates me, a maturer form of cupboard love, the affection of children for those who make them presents and take them about to spectacles. I am thoughtless, hair-brained—neither wise nor experienced, yet I feel that if I loved as you love, and my soul were bound to a dead heart that absorbed the generous warmth and returned none, I should wish myself dead."

"But yours is no dead heart, 'tis one that even now responds to mine: its warmth is in this gentle hand, in your cheek, and moistening eye."

Lady Betty shook her head. "You mistake my sentiment," said she. "Be guided by your sense, Tom. What am I? A young and untried girl. I have flesh and blood like yours, and one day I too may love with all my soul—wildly, irrationally, desperately, even to the loss of all I hold now most dear. And if the one I love is not my husband, what happiness in this world can there be for him or me? No, Tom, dear—for I may call you by that name and not be misunderstood, feeling so tenderly towards you, sympathising with you, quite yearning for your happiness, as I do—it would be the cruellest, most heartless act of my life to accept your love, to give you my hand, doubting as I doubt."

"Do not think of me," Tom cried, "or if you will, think only of the happiness you can give me. I ask for no more love than you have now. It is more than ten thousand wives have to give their husbands. Think only of yourself, and that in marrying me you secure a faithful friend whose only thought will be to make you happy."

"And looking at it from that selfish point of view, can I believe that you will make me happy?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"Yes. You are twenty times more jealous than the Moor in the play. You are angry if a man looks at me—though I do you the justice to think you would be equally angry if they didn't—you look as if you would like to kill the young gentlemen who put up their glasses at me in the crush-room of the theatre, and will find a dozen excuses to avoid passing a knot of dandies in the park. That amuses me very much now, and I may tell you that I take a great delight in making you fume with rage against some poor harmless military gentleman, or over-dressed fop; but I assure you it would distress me greatly to be doubted if I were your loyal wife."

"I will cure myself of jealousy—'tis a contemptible, unmanly fault," cried Tom.

"Do, Tom," said Lady Betty, withdrawing her hand, and subtly drawing the tambour frame between herself and him, while he was still thinking over his own failing. "Do, and by the time you *have* overcome that weakness, if I am not married to somebody else, it is very possible I shall be glad to marry you."

She said this with a light laugh, and her fingers were once more engaged upon the tambour.

CHAPTER XVII.

GERARD CREWE.

TOM TALBOT sat in his chamber with a book in his hand. Suddenly he closed the work and flung it to the other end of the room, albeit it was the "Paradise Lost" of John Milton, and deserved more reverential treatment. But when a man is disgusted with himself, Paradise itself would fail to please him.

"I deserve contempt," said he, "for who with a spark of manliness would grudge a sweet girl the homage she deserves, or descend to mean shifts for depriving her of admiration. And how on earth can a woman love a man she cannot respect? What is the hour? Two. I will find Mr. Crewe, and induce him to go with me to Park Lane this very day."

Tom caught up his hat—made a couple of strides towards the door, paused with his hand on the latch a moment, then turned about, looked at his legs, at his sleeves, and at the reflection of his face in the glass at the other end of the room.

The result of this inspection was that he made his way into the adjoining chamber, where he changed his breeches half-a-dozen times, tried the effect of every coat he had in his closet, and spent a quarter of an hour in arranging the curls of his hair.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't start fair," said he.

In pursuance of this idea he entered the shop of a dealer in fashionable trifles, on his way to Gerard Crewe's house, and demanded a walking stick of the kind most used.

"Ah! this is too short by four inches; it would do for a boy, but it is of no use at all to me."

"I'm sorry I have none other, Sir," said the dealer, "but long sticks went out of fashion last year, and short sticks are in. I may be able to let you have a long stick next week—if the fashion should change."

"If it is the fashion—I'll have it, though I have to walk with it like a monkey."

"The stick is not used to walk with now, but to carry under the arm."

"Ah! then the shorter the better. A little extension of the fashion and one may carry one's walking stick in the breeches' pocket."

"Just so, Sir. We must live in hope, Sir. Eye-glasses are in again, Sir."

"Thank God, I can do without them."

"Pardon me, Sir. No one can do without a glass now. They are not for the wearer's eye, but for the eye of the public, and are intended to hang down gracefully from the fob."

"Then hang me a glass from my fob."

"Now, Sir—there—so you look quite the go. You have a snuff box, I presume?"

"I never take snuff."

"Not take snuff! Dear me, Sir, where have you been these last three months?"

"Give me a snuff box and some snuff," said Tom, with a gulp.

"There's a beauty, Sir, for ten guineas—worth twelve."

"That will do—where is the snuff?"

"The apprentice has gone out to the 'bacconist's to buy it, Sir."

By the time the apprentice returned Tom had purchased two finger rings, a diamond for his cravat, and half-a-dozen seals to keep company with his glass, and with these acquisitions he left the shop, highly gratified with his purchases.

At Gerard Crewe's house he was informed by the servant, who answered his knock, that Mr. Crewe had gone to take the air in the park, as was his daily habitude from the hour of two till four, when he was not detained at home by visitors.

Tom made his way to the park, where he was fortunate enough to meet his new acquaintance—whose tall, graceful figure he detected in the distance the moment he passed the King's Gate. He was alone, walking with his hands crossed at his back, and looking from side to side of the alley as he passed slowly along.

Tom pursued and came up to him as he stopped in front of a thorn whose buds were just pushing through the sheaf.

The greeting of the men was warm for those who had so recently become acquainted.

"I hoped to meet you to-day," said Gerard, "indeed, I hoped to see you yesterday, but was disappointed. You were not at Brooks' last night."

"No. You were?"

"I am there every night."

"You like play."

"On the contrary, I dislike it at much as any man can."

"That is a strange reason for frequenting a gaming-house."

"Not at all; for it is because I dislike play that I win. Success or failure never excites me. I play with unvarying equanimity, and that gives me an advantage over the generality

of players. I should not have won your money had our tempers been alike."

Tom looked at his companion and was silent. Gerard, with perfect calm upon his pale thin face, walked along with his hands still behind him. After a few moments' silence, he continued:

"Mr. Talbot, I am a gambler—not in the ordinary sense. I do not play from infatuation, weakness, inclination. I have no such excuse—I play from purely mercenary motives—and the only difference between me and the common wretch who plays with three cards at a fair is, that I use no fraud."

"Why have you told me this?" asked Tom.

"Because, in the grasp of your hand, in the expression of your eyes, I have found a warmth something more than common; because if we are to be friends, it is necessary you should know at the outset, what sort of man I am."

"Your honesty, at least, commands respect; and there's my hand again, Sir, as a proof that my friendship is not lessened by your candour. For a truth I cannot like the manner in which you live, but since one fixes no blame on the lawyer who saves the man who deserves to be hanged, and hangs the man who ought to be spared, I see no reason for being too critical upon you. Yet for all that, I wish you were of another trade, and it seems to me that the faculty which makes you successful at the gaming-table would make you a creditable name in a higher vocation—'tis a thousand pities"—Tom paused, to muse in silence with his thumb and finger on his chin—his eyes upon the ground. Gerard seemed unwilling to influence him by a word.

"You would make an admirable general," said Tom, looking up suddenly.

"But a bad soldier."

"True, and that would hinder you from rising—even were it possible to rise—to such a rank. Your abilities would serve you as a financier, a banker."

For response, Gerard stopped by the park paling, and turning to a soot-grimed sheep browsing by the side, said:

"God made you as good as other sheep. On the downs mayhap you would be white, certainly you would be healthier and happier, but inexorable fate brought you to London, and set you to graze on a pasture foul with soot and mud, poordevil! and one is puzzled to know whether you were not by nature born a black sheep. I have thought of what I might have been and what I am so often and so long that I am weary of the theme."

"I don't believe in fate governing a man," said Tom, bluntly. "If a sheep had the faculties of a man he would give his master the slip and scamper back to the downs. But there is no reason because a sheep cannot behave like a man, that a man should behave like a sheep. It isn't English to be a slave without making a stout fight for liberty."

"Can you give a coward courage?" asked Gerard, quietly.

"Mr. Crewe—Gerard, I have said what I thought freely to you, for my feeling towards you is not of a lukewarm kind. 'Tis our custom to say unpleasant things to our friends, and make ourselves agreeable to those we care not two pins for. But if I said that you were cowardly, I refuse to believe that you are a coward."

"Yet I am. Not physically perhaps. I am too cold for that. I felt no more agitation in walking along this park with my seconds to meet Henry Grattan, than I feel in walking with you now. But morally, I am a poltroon, and to one of your robust constitution, that kind of feebleness will seem more despicable even than the other. I dare not face the possibilities that must attend relinquishing my present mode of existence."

"What are they?"

"The possibility of being compelled to serve in a draper's shop—lying to sell a few yards of stuff to a suspicious woman, or to sit from morning till night at a desk in a dreary office—leading the life of a broken horse that grinds a mill and stops only to eat and to sleep. The possibility of having to eat coarse food, to wear unpleasant clothes, to live with vulgar people, to sacrifice the delicate pleasures of art, and music, and literature, to be parsimonious and niggardly, of avoiding one's creditors, of grudging half-a-crown to a servant——"

"Enough! You have said enough to convince me that a man may be as wretched with three hundred a year, as another with nothing at all."

Tom turned the conversation to a general subject which allowed him to pursue an undercurrent of thought. He was not narrow in his judgment of men. For Gerard, he had a liking undiminished by the revelation he had chosen to make. He divided men into two classes, those who had faults and concealed them, and those who had faults and confessed them: and he preferred the latter. Nevertheless, he could not make up his mind to carry out his intention of introducing Gerard to Lady Betty. Gerard might be a gentleman, and as good as any who did not pursue his vocation, but he was a gamester, and in that very word there was something which made it distasteful to associate him with the girl he loved. Accident disposed

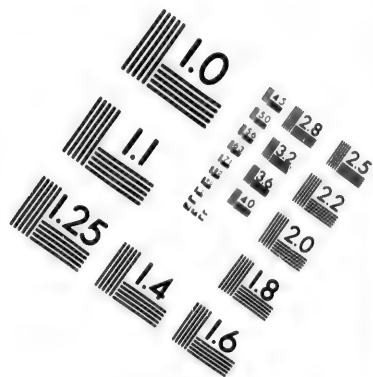
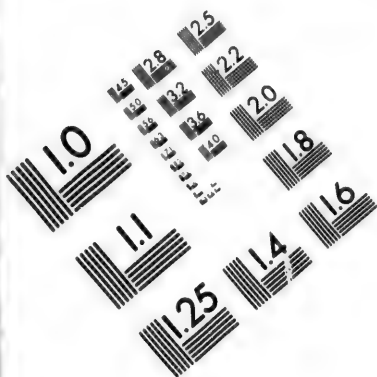
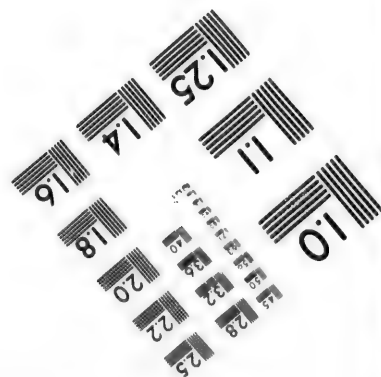
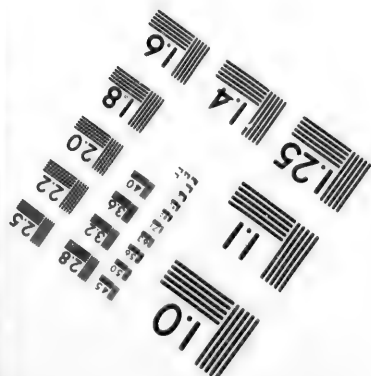
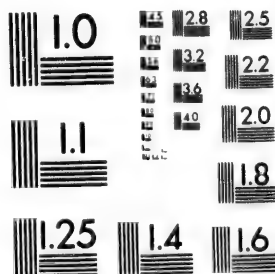


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the event, for while he was still in dubitation, they turned into the promenade, and came face to face with Mrs. St. Cyr and Lady Betty.

Mrs. St. Cyr stopped, and after a glance at Gerard Crewe, gave Tom her hand with a more gracious smile than she had accorded him for many days, and then made a profound courtesy to the companion whom he was thus compelled to introduce.

"Our chariot wheel has broken a spoke: so we are compelled to take the air on foot," Mrs. St. Cyr explained—"which is inconvenient, having no escort. However, I trust, Mr. Talbot, that if you and Mr. Crewe have nothing more engaging on hand, you will remedy the default."

The gentlemen replied with a suitable compliment, and the ladies resumed their walk, flanked, Mrs. St. Cyr by Tom Talbot, Lady Betty by Gerard Crewe.

Mrs. St. Cyr engaged Tom in a personal conversation to the end that Gerard should have the exclusive pleasure of Lady Betty's society, but this did not prevent Tom from making use of those arms which he had so recently acquired for the purpose of winning the admiration of Lady Betty. He flourished his cane, rattled the seals at his fob, and did not forget to use his snuff-box, giving it a very pretty tap before returning it to his pocket. Mrs. St. Cyr smiled approval, and whispered low:

"Quite the *bel air*, I assure you, Mr. Talbot."

Highly flattered, Tom repeated the application, and would have had no reason to regret his elegant performance, but that Lady Betty, turning towards him, put a question at the very moment when his features were paralysed by a vain effort to sneeze.

When they came to the end of the promenade and changed their positions to return, Lady Betty contrived to place her mamma next to Gerard, and to fall back in their rear with Tom.

"This is kind of you," murmured Tom, pressing the hand that Lady Betty laid on his arm to her side. "You have made me happy."

"'Tis more than you deserve. Not only would you deprive me of seeing your charming friend, but your ratan, your seals, your tobacco-box—everything that you know I adore, you conceal from me. Cruel man! If I had only seen you taking snuff before you made your proposal!—"

Tom did not reply to Lady Betty's badinage. He saw nothing to laugh at in being rejected.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOUCI ET SANS SOUCI.

"GERARD," said Tom, some fourteen or fifteen days after the introduction in the park, "you *must* come with me to Park Lane."

"And why must I, my dear Tom?"

"Because I have not the ingenuity and impudence to invent any further excuses for you. Every day, for the past fortnight I have been charged to bring you to dinner, to lunch, to tea, to look at the china, and what not, and every day I have told a lie to extenuate your refusal."

"A little more practice, and you will be perfect in the art," said Gerard, laughing.

"On the contrary—I get more nervous every day, and stammer over my fabrication to such an extent, that no one could believe me. And now it is thought that I purposely keep you away from my friends—from a jealous motive."

Gerard laughed again; then grew grave. Tom continued:

"I know the delicate feeling that has kept you from the house, but you may waive all objections on that score, for this morning, failing to find any plausible pretence for your absence, I ventured to hint the truth to Mrs. St. Cyr, who no sooner heard that you were a gamester than she burst out into an eulogy of gaming and placed you on a level at once with the finest gentleman in Europe—intending that of course as a compliment to you. I assure you that instead of regarding your profession as a disadvantage, she looks upon it as the necessary qualification of a fine gentleman. Knowing what you are, she is more than ever anxious to become intimately acquainted with you."

"And you, Tom, hoping to make Lady Betty your wife—are you willing that I should associate with her?"

"There is but one answer to that," said Tom, and he held out his hand to his friend.

The following morning Gerard accompanied Tom to Park Lane, and from that time he became a frequent visitor.

He did not attempt to conceal from Tom that he visited Mrs. St. Cyr for the pleasure of Lady Betty's society: and Tom did his best to accept his position with manful resignation—all but that position became more difficult to sustain—his trials harder to bear each succeeding day.

The weather continuing fine, the little party walked fre-

quently in the park, and scarcely ever met without Mrs. St. Cyr adding one or two names to the rapidly increasing list of acquaintances. For Gerard was well known to the fashionable loungers there, and Mrs. St. Cyr obtained introductions to them by plain, straightforward audacity.

"Here comes the gentleman who bowed to you the day before yesterday, Mr. Crewe—I beg you will introduce me," Mrs. St. Cyr would say, and Gerard had no option but to do as was demanded of him. The audacity, however, was never resented, for the gentlemen were only too delighted to have the opportunity of speaking to pretty Lady Betty. So the proud mother began to experience the delights she had anticipated: and on the day a real live Marquis paid a visit to them and made eyes at Lady Betty, whenever mamma pretended to look another way, she felt that her cup of mortal happiness was well nigh full.

It was only sink that Tom should sink in her estimation as others rose; indeed it may be said in her extenuation that he was less entertaining than he had been, and suffered by comparison with the fashionable young bucks who presented themselves in their most agreeable aspect.

"I protest that Mr. Talbot is getting perfectly objectionable," she said to Lady Betty. "He is always three or four days behind the fashion, and when he wears a new coat he seems ashamed of it. The first day he wore his diamond ring he turned it round to hide the stone. He is perfectly incomprehensible! and then his face is sometimes the colour of parchment—his eyes dull—and his nose is inclined to be red. 'He cannot help that'—did you say. My love, what nonsense you talk. We are not barbarians. And what would be the use of science and discovery, if one could not remedy the defects of nature. If London does not agree with him, I wish he would go away. No, my dear, I did not say so two months ago, it is very true; but Mr. Talbot did not require change then. He was bright, and cheerful, and amiable. Now, he says nothing—or if he does it is so extremely sarcastic and unpleasant, that one wishes he would do the other thing—and whenever we have a visitor he is sullen, he scowls, and his complexion grows worse than ever."

"Well, he may do his utmost to be agreeable—I will not contradict that—and he may be faithful and kind. I don't forget the presents he gave us on New Year's day, but he can give you nothing more before your birthday, and that is not until the autumn—as for me, one does not have birthdays at my age—and so I repeat, it would be better for him if he carried out

his intention of going abroad for a time; and I do not think in speaking of him you ought to call him 'dear Tom.'

"Two or three gentlemen have asked me what relation he is to you in consequence of your addressing him as 'Tom,' and his position here must seem altogether anomalous and unpleasant to our visitors. 'Tom' is far too familiar, and encourages the young man with hopes that are not likely to be realised; Mr. Talbot or Thomas would sound better, my love. You might suggest in an amiable manner, of course, that a little change would do him good.

"My dear, who *does* want to discard old friends when they cease to be useful—what a preposterous idea! Not I, certainly. But I cannot consider Mr. Talbot an old friend; he is not more than three-and-thirty, and we have only known him two months or so. It is entirely for his own good that I wish him to leave us for a while—say until July—your birthday is in August.

"Well, I declare, that slipped my memory—he is useful when there are four. But I object to that term 'harpooning,' sweetest. If I take Mr. Talbot's arm in order that you may walk with Mr. Crewe or another, that cannot be called harpooning. 'Tis a vulgar phrase.

"To be sure he does take the place of a brother, and without some such kind of attendant, we could not go about as we do, and accept attentions from gentlemen we know so slightly—there is something in that.

"And then he is liberal and suffers us to pay for nothing, and the expenses attending play-going are more than I can afford—the tradesfolk are quite irritating in their demands for payment. 'Cash will oblige,' is wrote at the foot of every bill that comes in.

"Ah, well! perhaps it will be better to say nothing to Mr. Talbot about leaving England at present. Don't laugh, my love. I was thinking how unhappy he would be to leave us."

And so poor Tom was tolerated by Mr. St. Cyr, and permitted to make himself useful—to take a back seat in his own box—to carry the ladies' shawls and cloaks—to escort Mrs. St. Cyr, while one more favoured conducted Lady Betty, and to pay whenever it was possible. More than once he secretly discharged a tradesman's bill, an obligation which Mrs. St. Cyr carefully overlooked rather than wound his feelings by acknowledgment, or to encounter Lady Betty's indignant protest.

He was not happy—far from it. It would have been well

for him if he had been banished from Park Lane. A few months of travel might have restored partly his old equanimity and indifference. But what lover ever seeks forgetfulness of his woes?

Lady Betty was familiar with him, playful with him, neglectful of him, and occasionally compassionate to him. But the girl was brimful of life and high spirits: she could not be sentimental—far less serious for more than five minutes at a time. Lady Betty *Sans-souci*, Tom called her. How could she be to him other than she was, being so thoughtless, so sensitive to pleasurable emotion, so delighted with variety, so intoxicated with flattery, and the glitter and excitement of the life around her?

Tom struggled gallantly through all to suppress the jealous revolt of his nature. He knew that his fault was jealousy, and he bravely set himself not to subdue the object of his jealousy, but to subdue himself; to be generous to the girl he loved, and bear his misfortunes manfully. The tear that Lady Betty one night shed for him was merited. For the successful effort of a strong man to suffer and not to cry out—to put up with neglect, and conceal his sorrow is more touching than the most eloquent poetry. It is more pathetic than death itself, for is it not harder to live and endure, than to give up one's breath and cease to suffer—to fight than to fly?

Tom was a hero—not of the perfect immaculate kind, but of the order of English gentlemen. He had faults, not a few—but his virtues outweighed them, and sent that end of the scale to kick the beam. Few of those who knew him recognised his heroic qualities. It was significant of his loveliness that his friends at the very offset called him "Tom." There are men who are never known by their Christian name; they are to be pitied and—mistrusted.

Lady Betty admired him for his virtues—his strength and honesty—and loved him for his faults—and they formed the larger constituent in the sum of qualities for which she valued him. It was a fault to be jealous—a fault to submit to her neglect, a fault to forgive the slights she put upon him, a fault to patiently follow her in the path which was all rose petals for her, all thorns for him, a fault to submit to the selfish tyranny of mamma—but did not each of these faults carry a proof of his love for her that was wanting in all the compliment and flattery of the brilliant train of admirers?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INVITATION.

ONE afternoon in the beginning of April, Tom arrived at the house in Park Lane, carrying two bouquets. He had engaged a box at the opera, and the bouquets were for Lady Betty and Mrs. St. Cyr. Lady Betty was always grateful for flowers, and never failed to reward her lover for a bouquet with five minutes' sweetness; and so, expectant of happiness, Tom ran up-stairs, and entered the drawing-room with a light foot and a cheerful face. Gerard Crewe was sitting with the ladies, who were talking with much excitement.

"Oh, Tom! what do you think?" exclaimed Lady Betty, springing up from her seat and clapping her hands, as he entered.

"Not the slightest idea," answered Tom, standing still with the bouquets in his hands.

"Why, Mr. Crewe has obtained invitations for us from Mrs. Walker, for her mask ball."

Tom turned to a side-table and laid down the bouquets, conscious that they could claim no attention in the presence of this strong centre attraction—in fact he received never a word of thanks for them—saying as he did so:

"Gerard is fortunate."

"An invitation for Lady Betty and me," said Mrs. St. Cyr, in order that Tom should at once understand that he was not included.

"I am sorry I could not get one for you also, Tom," said Gerard. "But you know how difficult they are to procure for Mrs. Walker's entertainments at all times, and this is to be especially brilliant," said Gerard.

"The Prince of Wales is to be there, and the Marchioness of Donegal, and Mrs. Fitz-Herbert," said Mrs. St. Cyr impressively.

"You are going, of course," said Tom to Gerard.

"Yes. The ladies will go under my protection, and be introduced by me."

Tom seated himself, and said quietly, raising his eyes to Lady Betty:

"I hope you will enjoy yourself very much."

He found that she had become suddenly grave. In her own delight she had not thought how the prospect of her going to a ball without him would affect him. There was regret in her

eyes as she looked at him, and she said with tender earnestness, taking a chair close beside him :

"I am so sorry that you are not going with me, Tom," and she just touched his hand as it rested on the arm of his chair.

His face lit up with gratitude in the moment, and he murmured a few words which were unintelligible to every ear but Lady Betty's. A vocabulary of three words is sufficient for lovers.

Mrs. St. Cyr was already discussing the great question of dress, in which Lady Betty quickly joined, and in the next half hour the relative merits of every costume in Europe, Asia, and the northern part of Africa were argued *pro* and *con*. A temporary diversion was caused by the announcement of dinner, when Mrs. St. Cyr rose promptly and took possession of Tom's arm, while Gerard of necessity followed with Lady Betty.

The conversation was renewed as soon as the party were seated at table, and continued with such vivacity, that it was late when the ladies were ready to go to the theatre; nevertheless Mrs. St. Cyr ordered her coachman to drive round by Stanhope Street in order that they might see Mrs. Walker's house, which stood at the corner, and which was to be thrown open for the reception of masks on the first Monday in June.

The performance had commenced when Mrs. St. Cyr, in a gorgeous turban with nodding plumes, took her place in the front of the box with Lady Betty.

"I declare the Prince is in the Royal box," said Mrs. St. Cyr, in an excited whisper; "and there is Mrs. Fitz-Herbert, and who is that very distinguished-looking gentleman with him, Mr. Crewe?"

"My Lord Castlereigh," answered Gerard.

Tom was disposing of the ladies' mantles at the back of the box.

"Bring your chair between us, Mr. Crewe," said Mrs. St. Cyr. "Be careful of my fur if you please, Mr. Talbot. How charming the Prince looks—what a *dear* man! and to think we shall have the felicity of seeing him dance. I am told he performs both the Irish and Scotch steps to a marvel. My darling, look straight before you, and keep perfectly still. The Prince has his spy-glass up, and is looking at you. Oh, I feel all of a flutter—my scent bottle if you please, Mr. Talbot. There's a gentleman in the box on the right looking straight across at you, my love—who can he be? My spy-glass if you please, Mr. Talbot. There's Lord Forsith bowing.

"My love, your front tuft wants a touch on the right. The

Prince is looking again. Ah, there's the Marquis Dolgelly in the omnibus wanting to bow. My bouquet if you please, Mr. Talbot. Here's all the rank and fashion to be sure. What a charming opera! I never enjoyed one so much in my life. The Prince can't keep his eyes off you, I protest. Oh, I adore the opera—such sentiment, such—what is it all about, Mr. Talbot? you understand the Italian."

In this manner Mrs. St. Cyr gave herself up to the delights of music, and continued to chat in a tone sufficiently loud to prevent any one in the box following a bar of melody until a tap at the door of the box announced visitors, and Tom, in his customary function of useful friend, opened the door and admitted three gentlemen who had come to pay their respects to Lady Betty. When they left, Gerard rose and withdrew, giving his chair to Tom, with a significant look of sympathy.

"I hope you are enjoying the music," whispered Tom to Lady Betty.

"To tell you the truth, I have heard nothing but mamma's voice yet awhile," said she.

"My darling, the Prince has his spy-glass up again. Mr. Talbot, will you see if the door is closed."

"The door is perfectly fast, madam," answered Tom, tartly, without moving, and glaring across the house at the Prince.

"What an air the Prince has," exclaimed Mrs. St. Cyr.

"Yes, and a very unpleasant air for a man who has a suffering wife, and should set an example of fidelity and honour to the people he is to govern."

"Mr. Talbot! I beg you will not intrude your republican notions here. There are circumstances in connection with that unfortunate marriage which should be hushed up and concealed."

"I am precisely of your opinion, Mrs. St. Cyr," answered Tom, still scowling at the Prince, who was now toying with Mrs. Fitz-Herbert's glove.

Further discussion was precluded by the fresh arrival of visitors, who, occupying the front of the box, left Tom at liberty to amuse himself with his own reflections at the back.

It was useless endeavouring to overcome the discontent which agitated him now. He fancied that he was justified in regarding the course of events with mistrust and suspicion. It was not the laughter of Lady Betty listening to the wit of her admirers that agitated him, but the frequent observation cast upon her by the finest gentleman and the greatest libertine in "rope. He could not contemplate with composure the prospect of Lady Betty meeting the Prince at the mask-ball.

He knew the license accorded to those wearing masks, and his jealous love for Lady Betty stimulated his imagination to conceive as probable a thousand impossible accidents which might happen to her, and what protection would the giddy young girl have in her foolish mother? worse than none. When the Prince again took up his opera-glass, Tom, tormented to a degree bordering on desperation, quitted the box hurriedly, unable to stand there and see the privileged rake fix his greedy eyes upon Lady Betty.

He was walking in the corridor, with his eyes on the ground, completely unconscious of the people he met and passed, when Gerard came to his side.

"What on earth is the matter, Tom? Your face is the colour of ash, and your hand is cold as ice. Come and take some cognac," said he.

"Cognac will do me no good. Never mind me, Gerard, go to the ladies."

"Are they alone?"

"No, there are three chattering idiots to amuse them."

"What is the matter?" Gerard repeated, quietly. "Out with it, Tom; you're not jealous of idiots?"

"Gerard, can anything be done to prevent Lady Betty meeting the Prince of Wales at Mrs. Walker's mask-ball?"

Gerard was silent a minute, less astonished by his disease—for he had seen for some time what was going on in his friend's mind—than perplexed as to the remedy to be given.

"Yes," he said, "the actual cards of admission are not yet in my possession; I will tear them up when I get them, if you will. But first of all you shall come with me into the air, you shiver as if you had an ague upon you. Wait here a moment."

Gerard left his side, and Tom advanced to an open door, from which he commanded a view of the boxes on either side of the house. Lady Betty was looking through her glasses, and it seemed to him that she was looking at the Prince, which was not improbable. The Prince was looking on the stage, for a wonder, but that did not greatly lessen Tom's perturbation: it was enough that Lady Betty's glass was fixed on him.

"Come," said Gerard, "here is your hat; put it on. I have told Parkes to wait in the box until you return. Now, Tom, let us talk of this affair seriously. Do you actually wish that Lady Betty shall not go to this ball?"

"I cannot bear the thought of that libertine approaching her. He has been looking at her ever since she entered the box, and she at him."

"What is more natural? She is the prettiest woman in the

house, and he the prettiest gentleman, as the phrase goes. What then? I do not wish to defend the Prince's character, but I ask you, is he worse because his faults are public, than dozens of the men who can keep their faults secret, and must be met in any ball-room or assembly? Look at the possibilities of the case from the most extreme point of view. Supposing the Prince dances with Miss St. Cyr—which is one of the most improbable things I can imagine, will she in consequence love you less, or be less worthy of your love? If she deserves your love she will always be loyal to you, but any restriction you put upon her actions must lessen her esteem for you, and so shake her loyalty."

They had entered a tavern close by the theatre, and there Tom sat in apathetic silence, while Gerard used argument to bring him to reason. At length he shook off the mood, and rousing himself, said:

"Say no more, Gerard; my prejudice is not to be cured by appeals to my reason, for that is paralysed by these paroxysms of jealousy. My own conscience accuses and condemns me of something worse than folly. When the fit is upon me I am the slave of my evil passion, a slave meaner to my own perception, perhaps, than to yours. Let us return to the theatre; see, my hand is firm again. The madman has his lucid intervals. Nothing shall hinder Lady Betty following her own inclinations, while they are harmless to herself."

"Unhappily," said Gerard, laying his hand on Tom's shoulder, "you are not always capable of judging whether they are harmless or not."

"Then you shall be my guide, Gerard. When I am in doubt I will come to you."

Gerard pressed his friend's hand encouragingly, but he said to himself:

"My poor Tom! when can you be in doubt? 'Trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ.'"

CHAPTER XX.

WHO SHOULD WEAR A DIADEM BUT SHE?

THE forthcoming ball was the sole topic of conversation at Park Lane. Every visitor was taken into Mrs. St. Cyr's confidence, his advice accepted with unequivocal expressions of approval, and discarded the moment a fresh proposition was

advanced. The house was littered from the lumber-room to the kitchen fire-place with plates of fashions and "elegant designs." It was noticeable that each new adviser attempted to out-do his predecessor by the gorgeousness of his fancy, and that as the ornaments proposed advanced from beads and paste to pearls and diamonds, Mrs. St. Cyr grew more thoughtful and dissatisfied.

However, at the end of a week the dressmaker pointed out the necessity of an immediate decision, and then in a grand final consultation it was agreed to adopt Gerard's suggestion, that Mrs. St. Cyr should represent Night, and Lady Betty Morning. The great recommendation of this dress to Mrs. St. Cyr seemed to be that she could wear her plume of feathers, which might be dyed for the occasion at a trifling expense.

The dressmaker made her calculations, and speedily furnished Mrs. St. Cyr with a list of the materials—silk, satin, muslin, fine crape, sprigs of flowers and diamonds—with which she must be supplied within a couple of days.

Mrs. St. Cyr took the list, and having jotted down the possible cost of each article, and summed them up in a grand total, she hurried up to her bed-room, had an attack of the palpitations, and could speak to no one for the rest of the day.

The next morning when Tom called to inquire after her health, he found Mrs. St. Cyr alone in the drawing-room. She rose from her seat and greeted him with effusive warmth.

"I knew you would be the first to call upon me after my indisposition," she said. "You are ever so thoughtful, and considerate and kind; and I have sent Lady Betty into the sitting-room because I wished to have you all to myself for five minutes. It is so seldom now that I can have the pleasure of a little confidential conversation with a real friend. One's time is so occupied by visitors, acquaintances with whom one can have no sympathy whatever. We have quite decided about the dresses for the ball; Lady Betty is to wear a skirt of pink and saffron, covered with fine muslin looped up with sprigs of flower-buds studded with diamonds—Morning, you know. The pink and yellow sky with fleecy clouds, and opening flowers sprinkled with dew, is the fancy."

"A poetical and pretty fancy."

"Nothing to be compared with your idea, Mr. Talbot; but still Lady Betty is imperious, as you know. I shall wear a simple robe of the dark ultra-marine spangled with stars, a plume fastened with a crescent, a wreath of poppies, a dark veil gathered in with a spray of paste to represent a comet;" she paused for a moment and then recommenced: "You have

noticed, I have no doubt, with some surprise, that I have been ill at ease for the past few days, Mr. Talbot, have you not?"

"Nothing to excite surprise, madam, considering how much you have had to think on."

"I have had something to agitate me, which I was bound to conceal even from my own daughter, but I should feel myself wanting in gratitude if I made any reservation from you, who have always manifested such friendship for us."

"I assure you I have no curiosity," said Tom, eagerly; "I beg you not to open any subject painful to yourself."

"But I want your advice, my dear Mr. Talbot."

"If I can be of any help to you the case is altered."

"It is your advice only that I ask for, but I must beg as a favour that you will not mention a word of what I say to Lady Betty—she would never forgive me. You know how proud she is, and would I am sure refuse to let me accept any—any advice you may give me."

Tom bowed acquiescence, and Mrs. St. Cyr proceeded.

"My property is so bound up that I can draw only two hundred pounds a quarter for my requirements. My expenses in London exceed my expectations, and the tradesmen demand cash payments, as we are only recently established here. To satisfy their claims I had spent nearly all of the money I received at the spring quarter before we received the invitation to Mrs. Walker's ball, and I find myself with no more than sufficient to supply our absolute necessities. In this extremity I wrote to Dr. Blandly begging him to let me have a quarter's payment in advance. He refused. I then wrote asking if he would grant me a loan, taking as security a written instrument empowering him to appropriate my furniture and china at my death. Again he politely but firmly refused to assist me."

"Mrs. St. Cyr," said Tom, greatly embarrassed, "I beg you will not enter into these details. You may spare yourself and me unnecessary pain by telling me at once what assistance you require."

"My dear Mr. Talbot, you know all, and all I ask of you is—what am I to do?"

"Will you tell me how much the costumes will cost?"

Mrs. St. Cyr hesitated a moment, afraid to mention the grand total, and then for answer took from her pocket the piece of paper on which she had made her calculations and handed it to him to read. Without looking at it he slipped it into his pocket and merely said:

"I am going in the City now; I shall return in two hours, when I hope to be able to allay your anxiety."

Mrs. St. Cyr accompanied him to the door with a thousand broken sentences of protest, of gratitude, and apology, and finished, as he hastily withdrew, with a deep sigh—partly of satisfaction, partly of regret.

"Had I only known beforehand," she murmured, "I should certainly not have put down everything at the lowest possible price, nor should I have sent that plume to the dyer's."

That was not the only error she had committed, for when Tom came to open the piece of paper on which Mrs. St. Cyr had written her estimate, he read, in the bold, legible hand of Doctor Blandly, these words:

"Madam,

"I decline to accept your proposal, which I consider both senseless and wicked.

"Your servant,

"BLANDLY."

This was the polite refusal referred to by Mrs. St. Cyr.

At Lincoln's Inn Tom procured notes sufficient to cover the requirements of Mrs. St. Cyr, and from thence he went into Cheapside and gave orders to a jeweller's to make a coronet of stones to represent an aurora.

"There's not a gem will sparkle like my Lady Betty's eyes when she sees my present," he said to himself as he left the shop; and indulging his fancy with a picture of Lady Betty in her happiness, he stepped along lightly. He had a habit of repeating a phrase again and again as he walked, while his thoughts played about a central object, and these were the words he said to himself as he trudged from St. Paul's to Piccadilly:

"Who should wear a diadem but she?"

At the corner of Park Lane he stopped beside a butcher, who was gazing at an approaching party of equestrians—two gentlemen and a lady, with servants in their rear. The lady was Lady Betty, the gentlemen fashionable acquaintances who, in their visits, treated Tom with tacit contempt.

Lady Betty was laughing, the young bucks were simpering. They did not see Tom; he was unnoticeable enough standing there in his plain dress beside the butcher. They passed him, turned the corner, and went off in a canter at Lady Betty's command. Tom heard her voice.

He watched until her pretty figure was lost to his sight, and then he turned away with a sigh, walking now with heavy steps and a heavy heart to the house where he had hoped to find her and catch a smile

"They will be at the ball, perhaps; and maybe now they are arranging to dance with her," he said to himself.

It occurred to him that if he chose to withhold the notes he carried in his pocket, she could not go to the ball and dance with his rivals. But his better genius ruled his heart that morning, and Mrs. St. Cyr got the notes.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NIGHT OF THE BALL.

LADY BETTY was dressed and waiting in her mamma's bedroom, while that lady vainly endeavoured to get her foot into a shoe several sizes smaller than her foot.

"I know I told him to make them small, but I didn't tell him to make them too small," said Mrs. St. Cyr, pettishly; "I can't go without shoes, that's certain, and I have no others. I have got my toes in, that's one comfort, though the pain is most excruciating. A knock at the door? Come in. No, wait! Who's there?"

"I," answered Tom, from the outside. "Gerard waits, and the carriage is at the door."

"Tell him I shall not keep him a moment. I have only to get on my shoes, and one is nearly half on already. I shan't be ten minutes. My darling, I can never get them on." To the heated maid, "Pull, you stupid thing, pull!"

Presently, Lady Betty, unable to assist, and her stock of advice exhausted, left the room to descend to the drawing-room.

Tom was sitting on the stairs.

"Are you ready?" he asked, slipping one hand behind him.

"Quite. You have the first view: what do you think of me?"

"You are beautiful!" he answered in a murmur. "But the light is insufficient here; will you come down to the dining-room."

"Why not the drawing-room?"

"Gerard is there." She looked at him, laughed low, and laying her hand on his arm, said:

"We must go past the door silently, or he will be jealous, too."

They stole past the drawing-room door, Lady Betty with her red nether lip under her pearly teeth, and an expression of innocent wickedness in her lively eyes.

"Now, what do you think of me?" she asked again, as they came into the light of the dining-room, and closed the door.

"You, or your dress?" asked Tom.

"Both—individually and separately."

"There are no words rich enough to express what I think of your beauty; but your costume seems to me imperfect. Something should crown the perfect brow."

"Ah!" said Lady Betty, with a sigh. "I thought of a tiara—but mamma pleaded poverty. I did think of the light with which Aurora's head is represented."

"So did I," said Tom, bringing his hand from behind him, and putting a large case in Lady Betty's hands.

She opened it, looked at it in breathless surprise and delight for a minute, then lifted her eyes to Tom's face, and the next moment—laid the box on the table and burst into tears.

"What is the matter, dear girl?" asked Tom, in terror.

She did not reply. A girl does not make fine speeches when her heart is full, and sobs rise choking in her throat.

"Dear Betty—what moves you so?" he asked again.

"Your heart," sob, "is too—too good," sob, "dear Tom, and I—I am a"—sob, "selfish girl—I know I am" sob—"and I think only of my own happiness, and for my dear"—sob, "dear—dearest friend."

She came close to him, suffering him to put his arm around her and wipe the tears from her eyes with his handkerchief, as he said soothingly:

"Come, Betty dear, smile. I bought the toy to please you, not to make you cry."

"I wish with all my heart you were going with me, Tom," he said, still looking grave.

He looked down upon her sweet face, then bent and pressed a kiss upon her waving hair. It was the passionate kiss of a lover, but it imparted no more emotion to her than a mother's caress. Another moment's regretful silence, and then her eyes wandered to the table where she had deposited the gift, and she smiled again. It was yet April with her.

He released her, and she took the diadem—set it on her head, and looking at herself in the glass, gave a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"'Tis charming," she said. "I must go and show it to mamma at once."

"Can't you wait here till she comes down?"

"It is getting so late, Tom—and mamma must be hurried. Poor soul, she has to put on a pair of shoes, and the two are

only large enough for one foot. Ah! there is her voice—she has done it!”

“Mr. Talbot,” called Mrs. St. Cyr. “Will you be good enough to bid the coachman lay down the carpet and open the door of the chariot?”

And while Lady Betty ran up to the drawing-room to display herself before Mrs. St. Cyr and Gerard, Tom did his duty, and saw that the necessary arrangements were made: afterwards he had the happiness of taking Lady Betty down, and placing her in the carriage, Mrs. St. Cyr following slowly, supported by Gerard and the maid.

It required the combined efforts of Tom and Gerard to hoist Mrs. St. Cyr into her seat, for her shoes seemed to have deprived her limbs as well as her feet of power.

Tom closed the door, gave a last glance at Lady Betty's radiant face—and then signalled to the coachman, and saw the heavy chariot roll away.

“Shall I leave the door open for you, Sir?” asked the maid, when she had waited a reasonable time after the departure of the carriage, for Tom to make some movement.

Aroused from the lethargy into which he had sunk when the chariot disappeared from his sight, Tom shook his head without turning, and slowly walked away. He had nowhere to go, nothing to do, the customary resources of entertainment were unpalatable to him, and so he wandered about purposelessly, until it suddenly struck him that it would be agreeable to walk in Stanhope Street, and look at the house where Lady Betty was enjoying herself.

Thoroughfare was stopped in the approaches to Mrs. Walker's house. Carriages blocked the streets, and the masks made their way on foot escorted by liveried servants with flambeaux. In front of the house a company of musicians in costume received the visitors, a detachment of the Royal Guards kept back the mob. Tom threw himself into the crowd, and partly by the exertions of those around him, partly by his own, got a place in the front rank, nearly facing the house.

There was very little to see. The masks entering the house were the attraction for most people; but Tom fixed his eyes on the windows of the ball-room, and saw nothing else in trying to define the outline of one beloved figure in the moving throng shadowed upon the rose silk blinds. He had no doubt that Lady Betty was the centre of admiration, and a feeling of pride stirred his heart, as he thought, erroneously enough perhaps, that all the commotion about him was but a tribute to her beauty.

Suddenly the Body Guards began to back their horses, the hum of voices rose to a roar, and the royal carriage drove up to the door. The Prince of Wales, in a grey silk domino with a deep lace-edged cape, and Mrs. Fitz-Herbert, in a pale lilac silk domino, alighted, and entered the house. Tom then ceased to exult in the beauty of Lady Betty.

The mob thinned quickly after the departure of the royal carriage. In half-an-hour visitors ceased to arrive, in an hour the idlers had gone to their homes. Probably no one would leave the ball for three hours at the least. Yet Tom still paced the pavement, his head down and his hands behind him. Time was nothing to him.

The gaiety in the ball-room was in its zenith. Passing the house strains of music reached his ears. The sound displeased him; he could not look up at the rose-pink blinds; he feared shadows now, and his mind was again tormented with turbulent jealousy. He turned up Stanhope Street to escape the sounds of music. At the upper end all was still, the coachmen slept inside their carriages, and there was not a sound, except when a horse pawed the ground or champed its bit. Suddenly the silence was rudely broken by hurrying footsteps, and voices raised high.

"Mrs. St. Cyr's chariot! Mrs. St. Cyr's chariot!" was the cry. Tom stopped in amazement, and turned to see who called.

A man in a white satin costume, without his hat, ran past him, looking at the carriages and calling as he went "Mrs. St. Cyr's carriage!" It was Gerard Crewe.

Tom recognised him, and running after him, caught hold of his arm.

"What is the matter? where is Lady Betty?" he cried.

"She is quite safe," answered Gerard, without stopping, and still glancing from carriage to carriage, while three or four men still woke the echoes with their cry for Mrs. St. Cyr's chariot.

"Then why have you left her? answer me, Gerard. You promised to protect her. Have you left her with her mother?"

"Her mother," answered Gerard, "is dead!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A SECOND OFFER.

MRS. ST. CYR had taken a seat in a corner of the ball-room, which commanded a good view, and had not moved from it.

She was pale, and complained of "the palpitations," but Lady Betty, who knew nothing of Doctor Blandly's warning, had treated these signs and words lightly, and attributed them to nothing more serious than to the torture of wearing tight shoes.

Mrs. St. Cyr's excitement was followed by a strange drowsiness. A dowager who sat next to her observed that she dropped her fan without noticing it, and her head sank forward slightly as if she were dozing. At that moment she thought it right to awake her, as Lady Betty was approaching with the Prince.

"Rise, madam, rise," she said; "the Prince of Wales and your daughter are before you."

Mrs. St. Cyr opened her eyes, to see, perhaps, the consummation of her dream, rose with a faint cry, and then fell forward, dead, at the very feet of her daughter and the Prince. The subsequent inquiry proved that her heart was diseased, and its action had been so weak, that the excitement of the scene was amply sufficient to produce death.

It was the most severe shock Lady Betty had ever had. For some days her faculties seemed numbed and paralysed by the terrible catastrophe; she received the condolence of visiting friends with slight emotion, almost with apathy, as if she could not yet realise that the event was actual and real; then her spirit awoke from its lethargy, to suffer all that a womanly heart can endure in its first experience of loss. For a week she was disconsolate, refusing to see anyone except her maid and Tom.

In the hour of grief Tom had a manly incapability of saying anything, which made him a more acceptable companion to the sufferer than any wordy comforter. Beyond bringing her presents of flowers and fruit he offered no consolation, he was too wretched himself, but she knew that he sympathised with her to his soul's extent, his face was constantly long, his complexion bad, and more than once when she burst into tears he kept her company; for he remembered men at that time were either softer of heart or less ashamed of tears than now.

After Mrs. St. Cyr's funeral Lady Betty's grief diminished, she assuaged her tears, and began to look about her. One fine afternoon she consented to walk in the park with Tom. It surprised her to find all the trees in young leaf and delighted her also. They walked in the alleys removed from the promenade, and to Lady Betty's mind there was nothing more beautiful than the look of the tender green foliage, the bright soft light, and the occasional glimpse of gaiety in the distant promenade. The retirement harmonized with the lingering

sadness in her heart, while the occasional snatches of colour and life upon the promenade suggested hope and pleasure.

"Let us sit here," she said, when they came to a seat.

They sat in a soft umbrage, and Lady Betty, looking around her, said :

"Ah! if poor dear mamma were beside us!"

Tom responded only with a sigh, sighing not because of Mrs. St. Cyr's absence—he had an idea that Mrs. St. Cyr would not have chosen that pleasant retreat to rest in—but in sympathy with Lady Betty. Her face was pale and sad, she looked sweeter than ever in her mourning dress.

Neither spoke for some time; a sparrow struggling to carry away a long straw to its nesting-place presently attracted their attention. Lady Betty became interested in the efforts of the sturdy little creature, and her face grew animated.

"Pretty dear!" she murmured.

"Would you not like to go in the country?" asked Tom; "to hunt in the woods for primroses and anemones? 'Tis not too late."

"Oh, there's nothing I like better than hunting in the woods for wild flowers! Daffodils—don't you like daffodils, with their great, bold yellow blooms and tender green leaves? Oh, yes, I should like to go into the country!" She clasped her hands with delight, then with a return of gravity: "But how can I go now, Tom, alone?"

"You are not alone," said Tom, gently resting his arm on his knee, and looking into her face.

She looked at him gravely, dropped her eyes, and twined her fingers in silence.

"Be my wife, dear, and let us go away where nature is sweetest," continued Tom. "By the time the wild roses are in bloom your cheeks will be pink again, and your heart light."

She lifted her eyes and looked straight before her, her mind gradually wandering from the subject of Tom's remarks. The thick trunk of a tree stopped her view; moving a little from Tom and inclining her head to the side, she just caught a glimpse of the promenade—of carriages moving rapidly, of ladies gaily dressed, and dawdling dandies. Then a lady on horseback passed, and she craned her neck a little farther to see if she sat well, if her figure was good, and her habit becoming. Perhaps it was that glimpse that decided her fate.

"Be it yes or nay, give me an answer," pleaded Tom.

"No, Tom—I cannot marry yet," she answered, looking him full in his earnest face. "When I am sad I feel as if I would

like to be a sober wife, and think of no one but you, and settle down to the steady routine of a domestic life. But I don't want you to have a sad, dull wife, and I don't want to marry for a mean motive—a selfish end. I must give my husband love for love, or we shall be mated but not matched. Give me time, Tom. I do believe I shall marry you one day, for I can imagine no one so loving and true as you."

"Will you not give me your pledge that you will marry me and no one else."

"No—that would never do," she smiled. "I can do nothing under restraint. It is the fault of my nature. If I had been in Eve's place, I should have made myself ill with eating apples, without waiting for any serpent to advise me. Wait patiently a little while. Fruit is best gathered when ripe."

"But you cannot live alone in that house."

Lady Betty thought of the lonely house, and shuddered slightly.

"Everyone admits that," pursued Tom. "It will expose you to observation if I visit you more frequently than custom allows to ordinary friendship."

"That is not your idea, Tom. Who told you so?"

"Gerard." Tom hesitated a moment or two, then continued. "He has argued the matter clearly, and convinced me against my own opinion." He paused; then with an evident struggle recommenced. "I'll tell you all. The fact is, while you have refused to see your friends they have been thinking a great deal about you, and failing to see you themselves, have sent a message through me."

"How mysterious you are—why did you not deliver your message before?"

"You will see presently. Mrs. Walker"—Tom groaned—"Mrs. Walker desires you to live with her while she remains in London."

"How kind," said Lady Betty, her eyes sparkling.

"And Gerard has pointed out that it will be the best thing in the world for you, if—if you won't marry me. You know now why I delayed giving her message."

"You are a selfish, cruel—dear. Be cheerful, Tom. Don't you see that the prospect makes me happy. Why are you crushing that herb under your heel, and looking as though you wished that spot of ground comprised all London."

"Because I hate London," said he with emphasis, grinding a hole and burying the unoffending herb with his heel.

"That is to say you hate Mrs. Walker."

"There is no love lost between us. We have spoken to each

other only once, and parted with a mutual desire to see each other no more."

"If she was rude to you, Tom, she was rude to me, and I will speak to her no more."

"No. I think it was the other way. I was rude to her. I believe 'tis nothing but mutual antipathy. Do not let my ill-temper prejudice you against her—it is my belief that her intentions towards you are of the kindest—and—and I believe you will be happy if you accept the invitation."

"Tell me why the proposal is unpleasant then to you?"

"Consider what I lose! I may see you by chance now and then in the Park—at the theatre—in a picture-gallery—you may pass me in her carriage, or on horse; but virtually you are lost to me—for a season at least. Yet that may be no more than the beginning of a still wider and more complete separation."

"Oh, Tom, how can you say so—sitting here by my side, knowing me as you do. Am I heartless and false utterly? Did I say that I loved you better than anyone in the world that my words should be forgotten or mistrusted? if so I wish the admission unsaid."

"Forgive me for saying anything which could make you imagine me so ungrateful. What I meant is this: I cannot visit you at Mrs. Walker's."

"And why not? Listen, Tom—if I may not see my friends as freely as I wish—if you are not to be as welcome as myself, I will not accept this invitation."

Lady Betty meant what she said. Nevertheless at the end of six weeks she had been a resident in Mrs. Walker's house for a month, and had seen Tom three times and no more.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN EVIL GENIUS.

"DEAR TOM,

"Have you forgotten me so soon? I have not seen you for three weeks; it is not my fault. Come and beg my forgiveness. To-morrow afternoon I shall be quite alone, and, I think, gently disposed.

"Very affectionately yours,

"LADY BETTY."

To this point Tom read with a flow of happiness to his heart.

which was sadly in need of such a tender influence. He put the letter to his lips, for her hand had touched and hallowed it. Then he read the foot note:

"Postscriptum—Don't come to-day."

Tom folded the letter in sombre meditation.

"Why are you not to go to-day?" asked his evil genius.

And the evil genius having obtained great power over Tom in the past unhappy fourteen or fifteen days, he lent ear, and against all the better promptings of his mind, he determined that he would call upon Lady Betty this very afternoon. If Lady Betty was out no harm could be done; if, on the other hand, Lady Betty had visitors to whom she gave the preference, harm might be done, "and so much the better," hinted the evil genius.

He allowed no time for his blood to cool; in hot haste he made his way to Stanhope Street. As he approached the house at the corner, the Prince of Wales's carriage passed him, empty. He stopped and looked after it, trembling in every limb with the fever of jealousy. Poor fool! if the Prince had been seated peaceably in the carriage he would have felt no less emotion.

The footman, in reply to his question, answered that Miss St. Cyr was in the house, and conducted him into the library, where he found himself alone. The reflection flashed upon him that perhaps after all he had deceived himself. It was not impossible that Mrs. Walker was unwell and wished to be alone. He sat down wondering how he should excuse himself when Lady Betty came to him if this were the case. He listened to an approaching footstep with agitation.

The door opened, and there entered—Gerard Crewe.

"Ah, Tom," he said, closing the door.

The catch seemed difficult to fasten. He stood still with his hand on the lock.

"You have come at an unfortunate moment. Sit down," he said, crossing the room.

"One word. Is Lady Betty upstairs?"

"Yes; she is in the reception-room," answered Gerard, standing between Tom and the door.

"Then I will go up to her."

Tom tried to pass, but Gerard, quickly shifting his position, faced him still, and said:

"Sit down, my dear Tom; be reasonable. It is impossible for you to go upstairs at present."

"And why?" asked Tom, in a harsh voice.

"The Prince is there."

"I knew it—I knew it," muttered Tom, his face growing livid, and his teeth clenched tightly together. "I knew it the moment you entered the room. We shall see if it is impossible to go into the reception-room."

He pushed brusquely past Gerard, and attempted to open the door. It was locked and the key taken.

"Who has locked this door?" he cried, fiercely.

"I have. The key is in my pocket. You shall have it the moment you are calm."

"What authority have you to put conditions upon my liberty?"

"The authority of a friend."

"I refuse to consider you my friend. Give me the key."

"Not until you are reasonable, and know what you are doing."

"You villain! give me the key?" Tom cried in a fury, seizing Gerard by the arm.

Gerard was far the slighter man. In a struggle he would have had no chance against Tom; but he did not budge an inch. He looked in Tom's face with unflinching calmness, and said:

"Take your hand from my arm, Tom. What do you expect to gain by this violence? I will fling the key through the window rather than suffer you to disgrace yourself and insult Lady Betty. I am her friend no less than you; at this moment I am a better friend than you."

"You, a ——"

Tom checked himself. Mad as he was with passion he was ashamed of the taunt at his tongue's end.

"A gamester by my own confession," said Gerard, completing Tom's sentence. "Well?"

Tom dropped his hand from Gerard's arm abashed. Gerard took advantage of the momentary calm and continued:

"A gamester may yet have the feelings of a man—pity for another, blind and reckless with jealousy, and for a helpless, sensitive girl. Listen to me, Tom."

There was the sound of a door opening in the room above, and of voices, which, falling on Tom's ear, re-aroused the devil in his breast.

"I will not listen to you," he cried. "It is by listening to your sophistry that I have been cheated into error—that I suffered Lady Betty to come into this—this den ——"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I say that this house is vile, and you know it. Who is this Mrs. Walker—this fashionable beauty? A second Mrs. Fitz-

Herbert. And between you you would make a third of Lady Betty. You play the part of jackal to a marvel, guarding the royal beast with the hope of getting what is left when his appetite is glutted. Send me your friends to-morrow, you shall not live if there is justice in heaven!"

Tom threw himself in a chair, as if exhausted by the paroxysm of his rage. The street door had closed. Gerard made no answer to Tom except by a formal bow. He walked across and across the room, with his eyes on the floor.

There was a knock at the door, and Lady Betty, in a lively tone, cried, "May I come in, gentlemen?"

Gerard glanced at Tom, who sat sullenly in his chair and heard the voice without moving a muscle, and then took the key from his pocket and opened the door.

Lady Betty entered with a bright smile on her face, caught sight of Tom, checked herself in the very act of making a courtesy, and becoming instantly serious, said to Gerard:

"Mrs. Walker is alone; will you be good enough to join her?"

After a moment's hesitation, Gerard bowed and left the room. Tom still sat.

"Do you know that I am in the room?" Lady Betty asked.

Tom rose to his feet, and said coldly:

"You did not expect to see me, it seems."

"No: I wrote asking you not to come this afternoon. Evidently you did not receive my letter."

"On the contrary: it was that request which brought me here."

"In that case you owe me an explanation."

"It is very simple. I suspected your reason for wishing me away."

"You are so amazingly candid that I should not be surprised by your adding that the main object of your visit is to insult me."

"There are insults, less pardonable than the plain speaking of an honest man, which you appear to accept with willingness."

"If you think I feel any sort of pleasure in submitting to yours, you are in error."

"I am in no humour to bandy words, Lady Betty, the subject is too serious to treat with drawing-room levity. You know the insults to which I refer."

"In the matter of insults you must necessarily have the advantage of me. At present I have experience of only one kind of insolence, but doubtless, with Mr. Talbot to enlighten me, I shall soon know every possible variety."

"I would that you knew no worse than I can offer—the rudeness of a rough and angry man." Tom spoke with a soft inflexion of the voice, and his eyes rested for a moment on Lady Betty with a tenderness which did more to shake her than his fiercest words. "The insult which should make your virgin blood rise in choler to your face, and stir your soul with indignation, is that which men, wanting in principle and honour, put upon you when they claim equality with you."

"I do not understand you," said Lady Betty, with grave perplexity in her voice and features.

"My meaning is this—the men who visit this house, to whom you give your hand in friendship, whose conversation you listen to, are *roués*—rakes—men loose in thought and principle, who wouldn't hesitate to take advantage of your innocence, seeking by insidious means to shake the foundation of your self-respect and delicacy."

"Tom, I should laugh if anyone but you talked such extravagant nonsense; but I feel more inclined to cry when you suffer your reason to be so warped by prejudice and jealousy. Is it possible that a society can be formed entirely of perfect men and women? Is each individual to be examined and to carry a diploma of merit for presentation on his introduction to a new acquaintance? And do not you think that if an examination of that kind could be made, the society founded upon it would be very hypocritical, very narrow, and excessively stupid?"

"While men conceal their vices they have yet a sufficient decency to claim our respect; but others, whose vices are flagrant, whose immorality is public——"

"Whom do you refer to?"

"The man whose society you prefer to mine—the man you were closeted with, while your friend Gerard held me a prisoner here."

Lady Betty's cheeks flushed red, and she cried—"Have you no shame, Tom? I was closeted with no one. The Prince was Mrs. Walker's visitor, not mine. It is a struggle to think gently of you when you wrong me by suspicion, and hard to bear in mind that you have been good to me when you treat me so ill. It was love for you that made me ask you to see me when we should be alone and free from the interruption of visitors—it was consideration for you that made me add the postscript; but love and consideration are powerless against your morbid jealousy. I sacrifice my pride in adopting this explanatory tone, for with all my faults, I am not ungrateful nor forgetful."

"If you knew the danger in which you stand, you would forgive me for my savage eagerness to save you—even if I had no other claim upon your tenderness."

"I do know the danger in which I stand—the peril that menaces every attractive woman, and I tell you this—knowledge is a better arm to virtue than ignorance."

Tom did not respond. The fact that he had been shamefully unjust to Lady Betty, and made a fool of himself, began to dawn upon his mind.

"To think you should misdoubt me so!" said Lady Betty, then her courage giving way, she sought her pocket-handkerchief, sobbing—"I—I believe you would shut me up in a convent if you could."

"No, not that—I would shield you from harm, not with cold walls, but with these two loving arms, dear girl. Give me by a word the right to be your champion and defender."

"No, Tom, no." Lady Betty said with resolution, as she wiped her eyes and put her handkerchief away. "No. I will not marry until I feel quite certain that my husband and I shall make each other happy. And just at this moment"—she added with a gleam of her habitual humour—"the prospect is not very promising."

"You are right," said Tom. Then he held out his hand and she gave him hers, and they stood looking into each other's eyes sadly for some seconds.

Their thoughts were not in the same train, yet the thought of each was pregnant with regret.

Lady Betty had expected their meeting and their parting to be so different. For instead of thinking harm of her lover, she had put a favourable construction upon his absence, and half determined that when they met she would let him see just how much she loved him; and if, in consequence, he should repeat the offer of marriage, she thought she might say yes.

She had surveyed mankind during her residence with Mrs. Walker, and found no specimen at all comparable with Tom. Now, this little scheme must be abandoned—and the chance of making him happy or of being happy herself for a long time to come, seemed slight indeed.

Tom did not know the cost of his jealousy, or how much he had lost by his inopportune visit; what concerned him was poor Lady Betty's grief, and he said to himself, that it was shameful to treat a sweet, unoffending girl with groundless imputations, and cruel doubts, and that he would take himself right away from her until he could think of her justly and well. He would not go out of the country—that would be too hard—but

to Talbot Hall—supposing he came off luckily from his forthcoming encounter with Gerard Crewe.

Then they parted, and were utterly wretched—both.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEFORE THE FIGHT.

DOCTOR BLANDLY sat on a firm, wooden stool, conveniently placed among the alders, beside the admirable preserves adjoining the old Ferry House Inn, Tottenham. His right hand grasped a rod; he raised his left hand gently and pressed his spectacles a little closer to his nose; his lips were tightly closed; his eyes were fixed upon the float; he scarcely breathed. His left hand slowly descended to his knee, and he gradually rose from his seat; then as the quill dipped once more he gave the line a snatch and felt his victim jerking and pulling at the hook.

"Ha ha, my boy. I have you this time," said he, raising the fish carefully to the grass.

"And you deserve him; you haven't relaxed a muscle these last ten minutes."

Doctor Blandly turned to see who spoke, and found Tom Talbot at his back.

"You, Tom!" he cried, wringing the young man's hand, and holding it in the affectionate manner of a sincere old friend. "I thought you were off on your travels again, my boy."

"Here I am, Sir, with as little chance of leaving England as that poor devil of a fish."

He spoke with unusual gravity, and fixed his eyes on the fish that was gasping feebly in the grass. Doctor Blandly scanned his face attentively, and laying down his rod, said to himself—"There's more than common meaning in those words, or my name is not Blandly;" then as he raised himself he said in a low tone of anxiety:

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"A matter, Doctor, in which I require your assistance, you may be sure, by the fact that I come to break in upon your sport."

"We will go into the house."

"There is no hurry for an hour or two. Throw out your line, and I will sit on the grass here by your side, and tell all that you have to know."

"If you think fish are to be caught while one is talking to

the angler, you do an injustice to the fish; and if you think I can enjoy sport and listen to your trouble at the same time, you do an injustice to me. Jerry!"

In answer to this call there came a low muttering from the further side of a thorn bush.

"Jerry!" repeated Doctor Blandly, impatiently. "D—that fellow! when he gets a rod in his hand he loses all sense of duty. Jerry!"

At the third call Jerry backed into sight, holding his rod at arm's-length, and straining his eyes towards his float.

"Another moment and I should have caught him!" he murmured, in a tone of deep regret, as, unable to protract his occupation to a greater length, he raised his hook.

"What, had you a nibble?" asked the Doctor, with something like sympathy in his voice.

"Not a quarter of an hour ago," replied Jerry. "Morning, Master Tom," he added, touching his hat.

"Where's Baxter?" asked Doctor Blandly.

"I don't know, Sir. He's been running up and down the bank for the last half-hour like a dog that won't take to the water."

"Jerry! Jerry!"

"Ask your pardon, Doctor, but that there Mr. Baxter he is such a fisherman. First he gets his hook in the weeds, then he thinks he's got a bite, and jerks his float, and his hook, and his bait, and every blessed thing into the top branches of an alder, then he breaks his line, gets another, slips in the water and frightens the fish, and afterwards complains that he never has a bite!"

Doctor Blandly chuckled.

"Well, well," said he; "fish out one of the bottles from the water and take it to him, Jerry. I'll wager he will sit still for half-an-hour with that beside him. What can you expect?" he asked, turning away and taking Tom's arm, "What *can* you expect of a man who allowed himself to be caught by Mrs. Baxter? Look around you, Tom, my boy; the tender green of these water meadows spangled here and there with patches of yellow celandine, over there all golden with buttercups, the hedges pink with dog-roses that give the air a wholesome sweet flavour, the chesnuts by the road, the pollard-willows bending over the shining water, the pearly clouds floating lazily before the wind, the red-brick inn where we shall find a snowy cloth spread with a great round cheese, a brown crusty loaf, and a jug of sparkling ale all waiting to refresh us when we enter. Here Nature smiles and says, 'Behold the very best I have to give, enjoy it and be happy.' To the rational being, with a

sound jacket to his back and eighteen pence in his pocket, there is, indeed, nothing left to desire. He takes and is thankful. But your wayward egotist, of which Baxter is the type, answers, "Tis not enough," and forthwith takes a wife, then, i' faith, he finds to his sorrow that he has too much, and knows the ineffable blessing of contentment no more."

Tom made no answer. Earth and all that it held, and more than that, he valued less than Lady Betty. He looked round upon the meadows, and saw them only mechanically; for the first time in his life the beauty of nature did not touch his heart. Nothing there could give him happiness, and he was famishing for want of it.

"She is not here," he said to himself, "and I—I cannot 'cloy the hungry edge of appetite by bare imagination of a feast.'"

They entered the "Ferry-boat," where Doctor Blandly's expectations were realised. In the sanded parlour a cloth was spread, and the untouched half of a ripe Cheshire cheese stood in the centre, flanked by a couple of loaves.

"I've kept it for you, Doctor," said the host, pointing to the cheese with pride. "Kept it untouched for a fortnight. Smell of it, Sir; look at it, see the veins of it, Sir!"

"Blue as a bilberry!" responded the Doctor, with satisfaction. "And now for the ale, Mr. Grigs." When the ale was put upon the table and Mr. Grigs had withdrawn, Doctor Blandly said, "Now, Tom, for your news."

"We will have our bread and cheese, first, Doctor."

"Right, my boy, help yourself. What ale! Yes, you can save the serious business until we have satisfied our appetites. Did you ever see a handsomer loaf than that now, Tom? Still, we can talk of trifles."

"Yes, yes, trifles," answered Tom, absently, munching his crust and looking blankly through the opposite window.

Doctor Blandly shot a keen glance at the young man, which assured him that he was in no humour for talking on trifles.

"I wrote to you best part of a month ago, young man, and getting no answer I naturally supposed that you had run away again."

"You wrote to me, Doctor?"

"Yes, saying I wished to see you on a rather important matter of business."

"True, I remember the letter; I should apologise, but that my mind has been burdened, burdened!"

"With business of a *very* important kind. Ha! ha! A little more ale, Tom. The fact is, I made a very lucky speculation on your account."

"Have you indeed."

Tom cut a crust, and that and the fortunate speculation seemed to be of equal interest.

"You can add close upon twenty thousand pounds to your capital if you choose to take legal advantage of your position."

"Oh, that's understood; set the lawyers to work and pile up my treasures."

"I should point this out as another instance of the natural consequence of folly and restless greed, but that the sinner is dead, and the punishment falls upon the guiltless."

"Indeed! Pass the mustard, Doctor."

"You remember the poor woman, doubtless—Mrs. St. Cyr."

"Mrs. St. Cyr; ah!" Tom laid down his knife, and his whole attention became riveted upon Doctor Blandly. "What of her?"

"She had twenty thousand pounds with which she wished to speculate. Her idea was this, she might purchase an annuity terminable with her life, which would enable her to live in a style consistent with her extravagant tastes, but not with her means."

"An annuity terminable with her life; but what provision did that make for her daughter?"

"None—absolutely none. It left her penniless."

"Incredible!"

"Not if you know the woman. I told her she could not live; she, confident in herself alone, believed otherwise. She fancied that by a lavish expenditure she should deceive the world with respect to her daughter's heritage; she believed that her daughter would entrap a rich man in marriage; and she believed that she would live to see her daughter thus provided for; she was wrong."

"Wrong—wickedly wrong. Did you not dissuade her?"

"I tried to dissuade her, and failed."

"Then Lady Betty—Miss St. Cyr has nothing."

"Not a rap. She has no right to another farthing of her mother's money."

"Who has the money?"

"You, Tom. It is the addition to your fortune I alluded to."

"I—I—really did not take notice of what you were saying. Tell me again."

"It is all told. When I found the woman inflexible, determined upon this heartless investment, I made a contract with her on your account—fancying that you would be more merciful towards the sufferer than the Jew dealers in annuities."

You said just now that I was to set the lawyers at work and pile up your treasures; if I obey your instructions, Miss St. Cyr should be apprised at once in order that she may give up her present style of living, and save as much from the wreckage as possible."

"You would not act upon that advice if I gave it seriously, Doctor. I did not know what I was saying."

"Well, my boy, we must think about what is to be done. Quarter day will soon be here, and the young woman will want money—she has already applied to the lawyer in Lincoln's Inn to know the state of her mother's affairs."

Tom pushed back his chair from the table, rested his elbow on his knee and his face upon his palm, and gave himself up to reflection.

The devil still lurked in Tom's heart—it was a tenacious devil—one not to be expurgated by a simple, "Get thee behind me." It was prompting him now to base, ungenerous action. "Why should you give this girl the power to live a life that you detest?" it asked. "Humanity demands that you should give her enough to shield her from want; but Reason forbids that you should give her more than would suffice to meet her requirements. Is it not for her good that she should be withdrawn from temptation, taken away from the influence of an idle and vicious society? Will it not reveal to her the shallow friendship, the false affection of those about her, to reduce her to a humbler level? And as one by one these lordlings, and fops, and fortune-hunters drop away, will not she realise the worth of truer friends?"

As Tom listened to the suggestions of his own selfish jealousy, his face flushed—he could feel the blood throbbing under his fingers, in the veins upon his temple, and he viewed with savage satisfaction the ignoble exercise of his power over Lady Betty, and then quickly came revulsion. He sickened at the thought of his own selfishness, his heart ached as he figured the poor girl's mortification in finding her mother exposed as a scheming, fraudulent woman, and her distress in finding that he whom she had trusted was heartless and mean.

"What are you thinking about, Tom?" asked Doctor Blandy, after casting one or two uneasy glances at the young man.

"Ah, indeed! What am I thinking about!" exclaimed Tom, raising himself with a gesture of disgust. "Myself—self—self—always myself." He thrust his hand in his pocket, and drawing out a paper, said: "Look at that, Doctor, and tell me if it will answer my purpose."

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Dr. Blandly put aside his plate—the famous cheese had lost its flavour as he marked Tom's agitation—drew out his spectacle-case, took a pinch of snuff, settled his glasses carefully, and then opened the paper.

This is what he read:

"I, Thomas Talbot, of Talbot Hall, Sevenoaks, in Kent, do give the whole of my property, my lands, buildings, goods, and money to Benjamin Blandly, M.D., of Edmonton, in Middlesex, to be divided equally, and as he thinks justly, at my death, between () and Elizabeth St. Cyr, of Park Lane, London. And this is my will and testament, written in the month of July and the year of grace, one thousand and eight hundred."

There was a furrow in Doctor Blandly's forehead when he commenced to read; it grew deeper as he continued.

When he came to the conclusion, he slowly turned the paper over as if he expected to find something further on the back, then he laid it down on the table, and looking straight through his glasses at Tom, said in a tone of perplexity:

"What the devil does all this mean, my boy?"

"I am going out with a man to-morrow morning, Doctor—that's all."

"That's all! and quite enough too, I think. So you are going out to cut a man's throat, hey?"

"The probability is that he will cut mine, for I know about as little of the use of a small sword as a woman."

"Then more fool you to fight. What is your quarrel?"

"I have insulted a gentleman—I left him no option but to challenge me."

"What do you mean by an insult? It isn't in you to offer anyone a gratuitous affront."

"I assure you the fault is entirely mine."

"Then the noblest thing you can do is to apologise."

"I consider that a mean way of evading punishment, and refused to retract my words. The seconds arranged everything before I left town, and we meet to-morrow morning. I should fight it for no other reason than that I bear my father's name."

"What better reason have you?" asked Doctor Blandly sharply.

"None. My adversary is a gentleman and a cool hand. He will let me off with a flesh wound, I expect—if not, what matter? I am a useless, purposeless man."

"How dare you say that, Tom. It is blasphemy to say that a single thing that God has put upon this earth is useless."

Tom was silent.

Doctor Blandly with a frown took up the paper and read it again.

"What is this blank space intended for?" he asked.

"A name that I shall fill in."

"Hum!" grunted the Doctor, "the aforesaid Benjamin Blandly, M.D., I suppose."

He folded the paper and laid it down; then he looked straight before him for a couple of minutes. He rose from his seat and walked in silence to the window, which looked out upon his beloved water-meadows and the peaceful stream, and then he softly whistled the first bar of his favourite ditty, "Up came a Pedlar," &c., broke off suddenly, slowly drew out his Indian silk handkerchief—a gift of Tom's—and took off his glasses to wipe from them a humidity that had clouded the tender landscape before him.

"There is not much to dread, Doctor; the man feels kindly towards me, I know."

"Oh, confound his kindness! 'tis of a piece with your gentlemanly mode of expressing regret for an affront." The Doctor took a pinch of snuff, which seemed to restore his vigour. "Well, Tom, I see no way out of it," he said, turning to the table again, and taking up the paper; "go and fight, if honour demands it of you, and may God answer your old friend's prayer and save you for a better fate than death by an English hand. As for this paper, 'tis enough. An alteration of one or two words, and the signature of a couple of witnesses, will make it as effective as needs be. Will you finish the day with me, Tom?"

"I have arrangements yet to make."

"Ah, well, well! Baxter and Jerry shall put their names here, and we will say good-bye. Good-bye! What a word, my boy! Good-bye! Think on it! And you a young, hearty fellow, while I——"

"Come, Doctor, I have need of all my strength; don't shake my heart."

"Not I, my boy, not I. Go and pink your man and come rattling along to me, with a look of triumph in your eye that used to kindle in your father's when he told of his tough fights. But I would to God your foe was not an Englishman. Who is he, my boy?"

"You are not likely to know him, Sir. A young gentleman of the town—Mr. Gerard Crewe."

"Gerard Crewe!" exclaimed the Doctor, dropping from his hand the inkpot he was carrying to the table.

"Yes, Sir. Do you know him?"

The Doctor sat down, evidently much agitated.

"Yes," he said, under his breath. Then, suddenly striking the table with his fist, he cried, "Tom, you mustn't fight that man."

"Fight!" echoed Tom, with a short laugh, "I don't know how; but I shall stand up before him to a certainty. What do you know of him?"

The Doctor took no notice of the question, but sat in deep thought until Tom repeated it.

"I know him for a dangerous man, a man you are not called upon to meet. His brother is a highwayman."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Tom, jumping up in excitement.

"Certain."

"You believe him to be a man without principle—a hypocrite?" Tom asked, with increased force.

Doctor Blandly, concluding from Tom's altered manner that he was glad to see a means of escaping from a meeting which his own weakness had necessitated, replied:

"I cannot tell you all that I know of him, but I have little reason to doubt that he is capable of precipitating a quarrel with a sinister motive."

"Then I will meet him with a light heart," cried Tom, springing from his seat. "If he is a villain all that I suspected is true, and nothing will please me better than to have at him."

CHAPTER XXV.

DOCTOR BLANDLY'S OPPOSITION.

GERARD CREWE was seated in the long room at Brooks', when the man with whom he was in conversation said:

"Who is the new arrival attracting so much attention. A country gentleman who has lost his way apparently."

Gerard turned his head, and looking over his shoulder perceived that the portly gentleman standing in the centre of the room, his legs apart, his stick planted firmly on the ground, his chin up, his pouting lips drawn down at the corners, and his eyes scanning successively the players at each separate table, was Doctor Blandly.

"A very worthy friend of mine, and possibly seeking me," said Gerard. "You will permit me——?" he rose, exchanged bows with his friend, and walked up to the visitor.

"Are you looking for me, Doctor Blandly?" he asked.

The Doctor turned without altering the set expression of his face, and looking him full in the face, answered:

"Yes, Mr. Gerard Crewe. I am. I wish to speak to you."

"Will you speak to me here, or will you accompany me to a room where we shall be to ourselves."

"A private room, if you please."

Gerard conducted the Doctor into a cabinet adjoining the long room. It was unoccupied. Gerard closed the door and placed a chair for his visitor.

"You have challenged Mr. Talbot," said Doctor Blandly, opening the subject without preamble.

"I have," Gerard replied, with quiet gravity.

"Well, Sir, the meeting must not take place."

"Must not take place?"

"You must not draw your sword upon Mr. Talbot."

Gerard made a sort of interrogative movement with his delicate hands, and waited for an explanation.

"In the first place I appeal to you as a gentleman and a man of honour. Mr. Talbot has no skill with the weapon he is to use: in all likelihood he never drew a rapier in his life. Do you think it fair then to take advantage of the superiority which you doubtless as a man of the world have over him?"

"The choice of weapons was with him. I am willing to use pistols if he prefers them."

"Pistols! a confounded murderous contrivance."

"May I ask if you have come on behalf of Mr. Talbot?"

"Yes; but without his knowledge. He seems more anxious to fight than you are—hang him! He's a hot-headed young gentleman, and from what I can learn it is as like as not that his quarrel arose from a mistake. Now can a misunderstanding, which a few words would set right, justify you in jobbing at each other like a pair of heathen savages?"

"I have no choice. You must address your arguments to Mr. Talbot. I have offered him the option of apologising."

"He cannot apologise; he comes of a breed that never did apologise."

"Then the meeting is inevitable."

"I have appealed to your sense of honour and humanity, I will appeal now to your feeling of gratitude. To Tom Talbot and his father you owe all that you have to be thankful for—rescue from the lowest depth of poverty and vice; education, and a sufficient yearly allowance to ensure you from returning to your original condition."

Gerard inclined his head.

"You knew this then?" said Doctor Blandly, sharply.

"I suspected it."

Doctor Blandly did not know what to make of Gerard's imperturbable calmness. Predisposed to think ill of the gamester, he set it down to cool indifference, and after taking a pinch of snuff and scowling side-long at Gerard, he recommenced with increased acerbity in his tone.

"Now, Mr. Crewe, I will attack you on new ground, and forsaking the supposition that you are a gentleman, a man of honour, or a person with ordinary feelings of gratitude, I will take it for granted that you have a tolerably deep regard for your own pecuniary interests. Let me tell you that this annual payment to you and your brother is made entirely independent of any claim that you can produce, and totally at my discretion; and I warn you that if you but scratch the skin of Tom Talbot, neither you nor Barnabas shall ever receive another penny of his money. Now, then, what have you to say to that?"

"What you have said does not alter my original intention."

"Then you knew the facts that I have stated?" said the Doctor, sharply.

"I suspected the truth."

"Who hinted it to you?"

"My brother Barnabas."

Doctor Blandly looked at Gerard's cold unemotional face in perplexity for a moment, then clapping his hands loud on the elbows of the chair, he cried in a tone of horror:

"Good God! can it be that you know all! that you are in conspiracy with that vile wretch Barnabas to rob Tom not only of his—;" he checked himself abruptly, and then speaking to himself rather than addressing Gerard, "No, I cannot believe that, it is impossible!"

"Finish your charge, Doctor Blandly."

"Tell me what you know of Tom Talbot—of his father!"

"I can only repeat what you have said; I know no more."

Doctor Blandly drew a long sigh of relief, and seemed at a loss to know how to proceed. After waiting a minute in silence for him to speak, Gerard put his hand in his breast-pocket, and drawing out a case, said:

"I am not wealthy, Doctor Blandly, but, for a gamester, I am thrifty. I have contrived to amass this little bundle of notes, which for the last five or six months I have guarded carefully, hoping to have, sooner or later, a confirmation of my belief. You will find that they discharge, as far as money goes, my obligations to the Talbot family. I do not ask for

an explanation of this mysterious generosity, I only ask for an extension of it by being allowed to purchase my independence."

"Good God!" exclaimed Doctor Blandly, sinking back in his chair, and adjusting his spectacles that he might look with perfect clearness at Gerard, then he repeated, "Good God!"

"And now," said Gerard, "you may perhaps see no reason why I should not meet Mr. Talbot to-morrow morning?"

"No reason! that's good! The reason is stronger than ever, for if I was in doubt about you before, I am certain now. Gerard——" He rose to his feet, and grasped the young man's cold thin fingers in his warm plump hand. "As there is a heaven above us you shall not stain your sword with Tom's blood."

"For a final reason, Sir, why not?"

"Why not? because he is your brother!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIGHT.

THE interview continued for half-an-hour longer, then Doctor Blandly and Gerard Crews left the house together, walked into the Strand, and separated amicably at the hotel where the Doctor had arranged to stay for the night.

Gerard returned to Brooks', where he stayed all night, risking a few pounds at a faro-table, but playing neither continuously nor with interest, and rather, as it seemed, to beguile the time than to win money. At five o'clock he was joined by two gentlemen, and they conversed in the cabinet where Doctor Blandly had sat with Gerard, until about half-past five, when a fourth gentleman entered the room.

"The carriage is at the door, are we all ready?" he asked, after exchanging hurried salutations with the company.

"Quite, as far as I am concerned," answered Gerard.

The other gentlemen expressed their readiness, and all four at once descended to the street, where a carriage with a pair of horses was waiting. A couple of rapiers and a mahogany case were on the seat: the seconds took the swords between their knees, the surgeon nursed his property, and Gerard having seated himself, the carriage started off.

At ten minutes before six they were on foot again, and making their way down an avenue of the park, Gerard and a second in advance, the other second with the surgeon following.

It was a grey morning, a drizzling rain had been falling, and drops still fell from the trees. Gerard looked up at the heavens with anxiety; an inky cloud was sweeping up under the grey veil that covered the sky.

"A mighty bad morning for our business," said the second. "If it rains will you toss for sides, and take the chance of getting the drift in your eyes, or play under the oak?"

"Under the oak," answered Gerard.

His second looked at him with surprise.

Gerard stepped aside from the path and tried the grass.

"Tis dangerously slippery," he said.

"That gives you the advantage, with your cool hand; our adversary will slip about like an eel in his impetuosity. All you have to do is to stand still and pink him."

"You understand distinctly that I offer Mr. Talbot the option of apology."

"Certainly—you don't feel nervous, do you, Crewe?"

"I never felt less firm in my life."

"Ah! you ought to have turned into bed for a few hours like a rational being, instead of sitting up all night in that hot room. However, you have nothing to fear. Ah! here we are."

Turning the angle and coming in sight of the King's Oak, they perceived, standing under its wide-spread boughs, Tom Talbot, with his two friends. A slight shiver ran through Gerard's frame, which was observed by his seconds. The black cloud came nearer. Having approached within a dozen yards of the oak, the party stopped. Gerard remained with the surgeon while the principals on both sides stepped forward to meet each other.

"Do you stick to your odds, Athol?" asked the second who had been walking with Gerard.

"Yes, twenty to one on our man—in fifties."

"Done," and then the two gentlemen saluted the others, and proceeded with the usual preliminaries. Gerard had turned his eyes away, and not looked at Tom after the moment that he first caught sight of him. The cloud had come over the oak and the rain was now falling in heavy drops. The seconds returned, saying that Mr. Talbot refused to make any kind of apology.

"And the rain—what is settled about that?" asked Gerard.

"It is a matter of indifference to Mr. Talbot. He gives you the choice."

"Then we will fight under the oak."

The seconds interchanged a quick glance, Mr. Athol lo

the less cheerful of the two. Under the oak the rain was not felt, except in the occasional splash of accumulated drops, but the grass was not less slippery. Having taken off his coat, waistcoat and cravat, Gerard kicked off his shoes. Again the seconds glanced significantly at each other : then everything being ready the principals advanced, Tom with his eyes fixed on his opponent—Gerard with his eyes upon the ground, until the moment that they were within a couple of paces of each other. For a moment they stood looking at each other full in the eyes. Tom, with an expression of dogged resolution on his square, English face. Gerard, with firmly set lips, and brow contracted rather in apprehension than anger. They saluted, measured swords, recovered, and crossed.

Thus far Tom had acted upon the instruction he had received in the lesson taken over night, but now ignorant of the *finesses* and delicate play upon which the duellist's safety depends, he trusted for success to a quick and strong attack. The slight figure of his adversary, the consciousness of his own physical strength, gave him confidence, he saw nothing to prevent him plunging his sword through Gerard's body at once; bracing the muscles of his right hand and arm, he made a heavy lunge. To his utter astonishment the point of his sword was turned aside by a mere turn of Gerard's wrist, and he knew, as he clumsily recovered, that he was at his antagonist's mercy, and that it was in gallant consideration for his helplessness, that Gerard spared him.

"What on earth is Crewe about?" whispered Mr. Athol to his companion. "He might have pinked his man and finished the business, had he used the opportunity."

Once more Tom lunged, shortening his sword and throwing the weight of his body upon it; with a quick movement Gerard drew away, turning the point wide of its mark.

"Now," murmured Mr. Athol, stamping his foot, in expectation of the final *coup*, as the top of Tom's shoulder lined with Gerard's breast. "Great heavens! he has not touched him, when he might have spitted him down the middle like a capon."

Nettled with his own want of skill, Tom, as soon as he recovered, recommenced the attack, and plunged wildly again and again at his adversary, until at length, perceiving, what to the seconds was obvious from the first, that he had no chance of success, and that the only use Gerard made of his superiority was to foil his attempts, he threw down his rapier, and stood with his hands down for his adversary to do what he would. Exasperated with defeat, he would willingly at that moment

have received Gerard's point upon his breast, he was quite unprepared for any other result, and when Gerard threw down his sword also, and stepping forward, extended his open right hand, he hesitated a moment, at a loss to know how to act.

Doctor Blandly had said the man was a rascal and a hypocrite, but judging him by his own experience, could he prove a single departure from the behaviour of a friend and a gentleman. All his suspicions were based upon the supposition that Gerard was false, but with this convincing proof of loyalty those suspicions were unjust and indefensible. If Tom was ashamed of being beaten and reluctant to yield to a foe, he was by the same principle unwilling to be outdone in generosity, or to hold out against the advances of a friend, and so after that brief moment of doubt and hesitation, he gave his hand frankly to Gerard, saying: "I have behaved unhandsomely, and I ask your forgiveness."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

TOM walked off the field with a hang-dog look, and made no response to the cheerful congratulations of his seconds. It was not in his nature to underrate his own shortcomings, or to look on the cheerful side of the defeat.

"I have made a fool of myself—insulted my friend, and been beaten," he said to himself.

His adversary's generosity aggravated his mortification. He declined to take a place with his seconds in the carriage that was waiting for them; he thanked them very civilly for their services, and went his own way, without even asking them to breakfast with him. He sat in his chamber with his hands buried in his pockets, thinking of his faults until he felt absolutely sick, and the girl brought a tray laid with a substantial breakfast. He ate heartily, and finding his sickness considerably lessened, he rose from the table with vigour, sat down at a desk and wrote this letter.

"Dear Doctor,—

"I have been thoroughly beaten, but my adversary generously contented himself with a bloodless victory, though he might have done my business a dozen times. I honestly believe you are mistaken in him. As far as concerns my quarrel with Mr. Gerard Crewe, I am convinced that all the blame was on my

side, and as I reflect that a couple of hours ago I was doing my best to stick a small sword through his heart, I feel heartily ashamed that I took no better pains to prove the truth of my suspicions beforehand.

"I shall leave London by the first coach that starts for Sevenoaks, and there I shall stay till the madness which hath afflicted me to the discomfort of those I most love, shall have passed off. With regard to Miss St. Cyr, since fate has decided that she is not to have the half of my fortune, I beg that you will continue to place at her disposal the same annual amount paid to the late Mrs. St. Cyr, and I trust to your kindness to make the payment in such a manner that she may not know her mother's fault, nor the source from which the money comes. In conclusion, my dear friend, I ask you to believe me ever—

"Your grateful and devoted,

"TOM TALBOT."

Having despatched this letter, Tom had nothing else to do than to lock up his chamber and walk to the "Blue Boar" in Holborn. Nevertheless he stood irresolute upon his path for some time with his face due north. On the right hand lay Holborn, on the left Stanhope Street.

"I am going away for weeks—perhaps for months," thought he. "May I not hang about for a couple of hours or so to catch a last glimpse of her. She need not see me, I will do nothing to renew her pain. One glimpse of her—God knows, 'tis little enough to face the dreary solitude of months withal! The clouds have broken, and she may go for a drive in an hour." He cast his eye westwards. "But suppose that by accident she sees me—we must speak, and then farewell to my fine resolutions. What a feeble fool I am. Hang me, if I give in!" And with that he deliberately turned his face to the east, and marched with steadfast firmness—for nearly two hundred yards, when he stopped dead short, struck with the recollection that the coach did not leave the "Blue Boar" until one o'clock.

Looking at his watch, he found that it wanted yet a quarter of eleven. He could walk to the "Blue Boar" in half-an-hour—a hackney-coach would carry him there in twenty minutes; why should he spend a miserable hour in Holborn when the air of the West End was so much more pleasant? There was but one logical answer to be made to this question, so he turned about, and with a lighter and quicker step, made his way to the Park, taking a seat by the drive, whence he could see those who came and went for a long distance. If Lady Betty came

out this morning she would pass this seat ; but he could see her afar and retire in time to escape her notice.

Mrs. Walker was the centre of fashionable gossip. It flowed to her in little streams as to a reservoir, and the great world came to drink. She had a host of humble admirers, whose visits she encouraged if they only brought interesting items of news. An hour after Tom had engaged two friends to support him in his duel, the intelligence was carried to Mrs. Walker, and though in consideration for Lady Betty she retailed the important information in secret to her visitors, it reached the girl's quick ear before nightfall, and for a time so overwhelmed her with horror and dread that she forgot the commonest conveniences of society, and would have run there and then to Tom's chambers and begged him for the love of her to withdraw from the engagement, had not Mrs. Walker, to avoid such an indecency, assured her that Mr. Talbot had changed his abode. Then she wished to write to Mr. Crewe imploring him to hold his hand, but fortunately Mrs. Walker contrived to delay the sending of the letter until she had made her young friend see that honour and polite usage both forbade any interference with gentlemen engaged in the genteel business of seeking each other's lives.

Yet though she was induced to submit to the guidance of her friend, no arguments could make her look at the affair as a delicate compliment to herself which she would one day look back upon with pride ; and nothing could keep her from bursting into tears at the mention of the men's names. She liked Gerard, she loved Tom—she lingered to listen to the conversation touching the duel with the fascination that attracts women to look upon a terrible possibility ; but when the subject was exhausted, she escaped to her room and gave herself up to grief.

It was so awful to think that for a simple misunderstanding the man who had befriended her, who, she knew, in his heart loved her sincerely, should die, and be for ever lost to her. Lady Betty was careless, frivolous, and thoughtless, but she was not heartless. She loved Tom more thoroughly than he in his jealousy could love her. She would have risked her life to spare him pain, but he in his selfishness risked his life only thinking that it would be good to be rid of a tiresome existence, and without consideration of the grief his loss would produce upon Lady Betty.

Lying sleepless in the dark the imagination is active, the reason torpid. As she lay upon her comfortless bed a hundred

wild schemes for preventing the combat passed in review before Lady Betty's mind, and when the first glimpse of dawn entered the window, she jumped up, determined to escape from the house before the servants were about, and go to the park, where she had heard the meeting was to take place, and to throw herself between the swords of her lover and her friend.

Before she was safely out of the house she perceived that her project, so feasible in its first conception, was no more than a forlorn hope. The precise time of meeting was doubtful—the exact spot unknown except to principals and seconds, who were bound to keep it secret. She knew that she should offend Mrs. Walker; she feared that if she were fortunate enough to find the party and prevent the fight, her interposition would only result in a postponement of the duel: but all these arguments combined failed to divert her from attempting that which was possible to her; and her courage was proof against the suggestions of danger which she felt in going out alone and unprotected at that early hour. Muffled in a dark cloak and hood she hurried into the park, and quitting the main passage speedily lost herself. It astonished her to find how wide and wild the park was—for she had never before left the drive and its adjoining avenues.

Mist shrouded the distance, and she hurried along ignorant of the course she took. Hazard led her past the King's Oak an hour before the party she sought arrived, and at the moment that the duel was taking place, she was far from the spot, standing in the long wet grass and falling rain, looking around her in blank despair, dismayed with her solitude, and shivering with excitement and cold.

Another hour of fruitless wandering and she found herself again in the same spot. Her tears, which had been withheld by hope, now coursed down her cheeks. She felt like a lost child. When she came into the avenue, which she recognised as that in which she had sat with Tom on the first day of her going out after her mother's death, hope was gone, and she sat down to recover her strength, feeling utterly worn out and wretched. The clouds were breaking and showed that the morning was far advanced.

"All is over now," she thought, and then knowing that the result of the duel would be known early at Stanhope Street, she rose quickly, left the park—a renewed anxiety giving her strength. She re-entered the house at the moment that the servants were making inquiries about the unfastened chains and bolts upon the door. They stared in blank astonishment to see her, deadly white and in a cloak sodden with rain. In

reply to her rapid questioning, they said that as yet no visitors or messengers had arrived, and asked her if she knew it was only just turned of eight.

She tried to walk up-stairs, and stopped after the first few steps, clinging to the banister. A maid ran up, helped her to reach her room, and then leaving her ran down to get hot coffee for the poor exhausted girl. The refreshment restored her. She would not lie down; but having changed her dress descended to the library, whence she could see the approaches to the house, and there she waited, sitting by the window.

An open carriage drove up to the door at half-past nine, with Gerard and Mr. Athol. As Gerard put his foot upon the steps the door opened, and he saw Lady Betty standing before him white as a ghost.

"What has happened?" she cried pressing forward to meet him.

"Nothing to pain you," answered Gerard. "I have shaken hands with Mr. Talbot, and neither of us has received a scratch."

Then Lady Betty began to laugh, while the tears dripped from her face.

There was breakfast and Mrs. Walker in the morning-room, and thither Lady Betty led Gerard with hysterical gaiety.

They sat at table until half-past ten, and then Gerard, seeing that Lady Betty was still in an unnatural state of excitement, proposed that they should go for a drive. Mrs. Walker declined, the hour being yet too early for her to appear in public, but agreed that it would be well for Lady Betty to take the air. So Lady Betty ran up to her room and arrayed herself in her best to celebrate the day, and took her seat in the carriage radiant with renewed joy.

The fresh air did not allay her excitement, and as she entered the park she laughed to think how miserably wretched she had wandered there but a few hours since. She was in a mood to look at all things in their gayest, brightest aspect. She laughed at every jest, and Mr. Athol, who had not hitherto been encouraged to regard himself as a wit, flattered with the reception given by Lady Betty to his slightest rallies, exerted himself to the utmost to be agreeable and witty.

And so, bright and beautiful, her mourning-dress discarded, and replaced with a costume of coquettish fashion, her face beaming with sunny mirth, untinged with the shadow of a single grave reflection, she passed before Tom's eyes, passed, sitting beside the man who had challenged him, and *vis-à-vis* with the grinning dandy who had served as his second.

"I might be dead and buried, and the very stone rotting over me, for all she thinks of me," said Tom, with a groan.

Then he turned his downcast face towards Holborn, having now no further wish to gratify.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT THE "LONE CROW."

On the outskirts of Woking village stood an inn called the "Lone Crow," a broken-down inn that had lost all traces of respectability, if ever it had pretended to respect. The stable gate was broken and patched with a piece of the broken horse-trough, the windows were broken and stuffed with otherwise useless articles of apparel, a corner of the square brick-chimney was broken, the thatch was broken and mended here and there with tufts of heather, and last of all the sign was broken, and only the tail end of the "lone crow" was left in the frame.

It was six in the evening, and the rain, which had been falling with steady persistency since midday, fell still with undiminished pertinacity; nevertheless a traveller with ordinary scruples would have declined to take shelter there, though all other inns in Woking were full, and he had to trudge on to Bagshot for a bed.

Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe, however, was as free from ordinary scruples as the host of the "Lone Crow" could desire, and so, when he caught sight of the inn, whose dismal exterior was to some degree redeemed by the reflected glow of a fire upon the dirty surviving panes of the window, he reined up his steed, and as Slink came to his heels, said:

"This looks like a good inn; we will put up here out of the cursed weather."

Slink might have had his doubts about the appearance of the inn, but he was entirely at one with his master respecting the weather, so he slipped off his gasping horse without a word, and applied the butt of his whip to the stable-gate.

"Hei! hei! hei!" called the host from within, in response to the vigorous appeal, "do you want to knock the blessed gate off its hinges?"

"It wouldn't be much the worse for a new pair," said Slink, regarding the ingenious arrangement of old rope and shoe-leather by which the gate was connected with the post.

The host, having opened the door of the inn and seen at a

glance the quality of his visitors, ran round to the back of the house, and with as much speed as possible opened the gate, which was not to be done in the mere turning a key, for several beams which served to shore it up had first to be removed, and then the gate required careful lifting in order that the weight and strain might not fall so heavily upon the shoe-leather as to over-tax its strength, which could have but one result—the fall and utter ruin of the gate.

"You'd best jump down here, Captain, and go into the house by the front-door: the yard's a bit moist-like with the damp," said the host. "I'll look arter the hosses."

"Oh no, you won't," said Barnabas, dismounting. "I want my horse fed; my man will look after the horses."

"Oh, that's your sort, is it?" said the host, sullenly. "Well, in that case, your man can get through the yard as he can. He'll find the stable right afore him, and the clover up in the loft."

Slink waded to the building indicated through the muck of years which festered in the yard.

The stable was in a better state of repair than the house, because, perhaps, the proprietor, not feeling himself called upon to regard external appearances in that which was less exposed to the public notice, had not patched it. It was as Nature had made it, an unpretentious ruin. At the dry end of the barn—it made no pretence to be a stable, except in having a trough against the wall, and a horsey smell—were a cow and an ass, which Slink promptly removed to make room for his own cattle, whose well-being was now the sole object of all his cares and hopes.

Meanwhile, the landlord of the "Lone Crow"—a thick-set, heavy man, with a broken nose and other facial peculiarities of a pugilist—having shored up his gate, returned to his tap-room, where he found his guest carefully arranging his wet coat and hat upon chairs in front of the fire. He stood looking on in silence, turning a straw over in his mouth, until Barnabas turned and perceived him.

"You've got the fire all to yourself, Captain," he remarked.

"Yes, and I want something more. I'm told you have sausages in the house. Let me have them at once, and get your best bed-room straight. We shall stay all night."

"Oh, will you!" The landlord spat out the straw, and then continued: "Look here, Captain, I don't waste no time, 'fibbin' and no feintin's' my motter. Money down, old Trust's dead. 'No money no match,' and that's another of my motters."

"Confound your motters! Do you suppose a gentleman's going to pay his reckoning before it's due?"

"I don't want to know nothing about no gentlemen, and if I did it ain't very likely I should ask *you* for information. I may have had more gents a-bucking me than ever you dreamed on. Anyway, I want a crown down and your stirrups."

"And supposing I don't choose to give a crown down and my stirrups—what then?"

"Why then, Captain, out ye go. You can walk out or I'll put you out, which you like and your man after you, and your horses after him. I'm not particular if it comes to a turn-up. A fair warning and no favour shown is what I say."

"You're forgetting yourself, my fine fellow," said Barnabas, disliking the look of things.

"Don't you fear, the Woking Walloper's got too good an opinion of himself to forget who he is."

"Oh, if you're the Woking Walloper that makes a difference. You can go and take the stirrups."

"And the crown?"

"There." Barnabas threw down a crown-piece with reluctance.

"That's business. Now we'll shake hands and lead off. I'll take care of the stirrups; they shan't leave my sight, you may wager. Will you cook the sausages yourself?"

"Yes."

"Then the missis shall bring 'em to you. Now we know each other. 'Make your match and come to the scratch,' there's a mottor for you!"

When Slink entered the tap-room he found his master in his shirt-sleeves a-straddle before the scorching fire that burnt upon the hearth, shielding his face with one arm, while with the other hand he held a long-handled frying-pan in which a couple of pounds of sausages were hissing and sizzling over the embers. Slink disposed of his wet coat, and sat down with that patient silence and immobility which characterises country servants in the presence of their proper lords.

In due course master and man dined together, the Walloper supplying their wants with the utmost assiduity now that they had shaken hands and were working steady, according to the rules of the ropes, as he put it. He even brought a pair of shoes for Slink to wear while his own dilapidated boots—which had been given him in exchange for the perfectly sound pair that the Lieutenant now wore—were drying.

After dinner Barnabas lit a long clay pipe, cleared a corner of the table, drew up his chair so as to command a view of the

fire, and bringing a pack of dirty cards from his pocket, nodded to Slink, who, in response, placed his chair *vis-à-vis* with his master, and heaving a deep sigh of resignation, licked his finger and thumb. With indefatigable patience Barnabas had taught his follower to play piquet, and now reaped the reward of his pains by repeatedly fleeing him every night of what change remained from the sum he had given him in the morning.

There was no play in the game, for Slink had to make all his calculations with his fingers, and was slow at that. But Barnabas had a certain sense of humour which was tickled by the errors of his adversary, and the simplicity with which he allowed himself to be tricked. Besides that, it was agreeable to him to cheat at all times, though he did but win his own money by the transaction.

"How much money have you, Slink?" said Barnabas, drawing a card.

"Two shillings and a gr'at, your honour."

"Put it down on the table, then. Ah, you've won the draw. Deal."

Slink laid out his money, wetted his thumb and finger again, and dealt out the twenty-four cards, wishing from the bottom of his soul that he might be lucky enough to lose his two and fourpence by a single hand. But there was no such luck for him. His cards were so provokingly good that nothing but the ingenuity of Lieutenant Crewe prevented his making "capot" time after time. If, endeavouring to terminate the game, he threw away three aces, he picked up three kings of the same suits, and when he discarded a quint to the knave, he took up another to the ace. Fortune opposed his losing, Barnabas took care that he should not win. Slink longed to be with his horses in the stable—to be anywhere except with his master playing piquet. It was otherwise with Barnabas. The difficulty of winning against such cards, and the necessity of having Slink's money, were a zest to the game which made him in no hurry to finish it.

With the villagers there had dropped in during the evening a pedlar, a loud, red-faced rascal, with a husky voice and an Irish brogue, who laid himself out to amuse the company, and succeeded to a marvel. He told stories with witty points, a little broad, perhaps, but such as all who heard could understand and laugh at; and he sang songs—Irish ballads, and the popular songs by Mr. Dibdin, and all with the same chorus, in which everyone could join without reference to the subject, words, or tune, and with an accompaniment of feet and empty pots.

Now Slink loved music ; in his happier days he could himself sing when called upon, and also he admired wit of the broad kind ; so when he heard the singing and laughter he felt that he could have given his ears to know what it was all about, and to join in the general jollity. But his master kept him to the game, challenging him and shouting out his points above the voice of the pedlar, and when he paused in his play to catch the point of a story or the burden of a song, Barnabas recalled him to a sense of duty by a smart kick on the shin, than which there are few other methods more speedily effective.

And so they played on until the villagers went home, and the pedlar retired, and the candle guttered down to the socket, and the unhappy Slink was so bewildered that he could not tell the difference between the king of diamonds and the ace of spades. Then the landlord of the house came and interfered.

"Captain," said he, "it's time to pull up the stakes for this bout. There's a time for everything, as the motto says."

"Another candle," demanded Barnabas. Slink groaned.

"No more candles to-night, Captain. And as you don't know your way about the premises, I advise you to go to bed while your wick's burning."

"In that case, Slink, this must be a drawn game, and—"
sweeping up the money, "so we are quits."

"Oh, fair and square!" interfered the landlord. "I'll get a candle if you're in the middle of a round."

"No—the master's won—we're quits," cried Slink, throwing up the cards, hastily.

"Well, if it's a drawn match—both principals agreeing—it's another thing ; and now I'll show you the way to your room. There's a bed for you, Captain, and another for your man."

"Much obliged to you, master, but the left for me," said Slink.

The privilege of sleeping in hay-lofts was jealously maintained by Slink, because in the first place, it was more agreeable to lie upon clean straw than in the musty rooms of the inns they frequented, and secondly, it afforded him a temporary escape from the society of Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE LOFT.

HAVING shaken some fresh clover in the trough, and given a parting caress to his horses, Slink, lantern in hand, scaled the

ladder set perpendicularly against the wall, and scrambled on to the floor of the loft.

"Hilloa! Who goes?" cried a voice from the obscurity.

Slink raised his lantern, and looking in the direction from which the voice proceeded, perceived a man well bedded in straw, sitting up between the trusses of hay which he had arranged as a protection against the wind. Slink's face, which had lengthened considerably on hearing the voice, expanded into a broad smile of satisfaction as he recognised the features of the jovial pedlar.

"Ah thin, 'tis you, my noble gamester, what's come to take up your quarters wid me, eh?" the pedlar said cheerfully, seeing the face beyond the lantern.

"If you've no objection, master."

"Devil a one. There's enough rats for the both of us, and I'm not graedy. You've a taste of the quality wid ye that tuk me fancy when I see you a playin' for silver wid your masther. Come, we'll reconstruct the apartment and spind a pleasant hour together."

"You don't play piquet, do you?" Slink asked with apprehension.

"Piquet—sure I played ut wance when I was in the army every night of my life—and I've forgotten it entoirely. But if nothin' but gamin' will contint ye—ye gamblin' spicklative divil, I'll play yer at all-fours, shove-h'p'ny, or any other ginteel divilment."

"I'd rather listen to one of those songs of yours with a chorus."

"Yir a flattherer for certain—an' would you sincerely love to hear a ballid?"

"By the lord Harry, I would; and if you can tell one of those stories again that made all the folk laugh."

"I nivir repate, but if it's stories you want, sure I'll contint ye. A bit more straw and another bundle of hay will make us as comfortable as a couple of pigs in a sty. Holy saints, we will make a night of it—give us another bundle of hay, darlint; and if you can pull the shate so as keep the rain t'other side of the hole in the roof t'will be nater and swater."

The "shate" alluded to was the cover of a cart propped against the roof by the posts of an old bedstead and the trunk of an apple-tree to preserve the hay from the rain that drifted through the broken roof. Slink re-arranged this contrivance with beneficial effect, while the pedlar opened his pack, dived into one corner and brought out a stone bottle.

"There," said he, as Slink returned and entered the nest

they had made with the hay—"take the trouble to put your nose to that, and tell me what is your true opinion of it?"

"It smells good," said Slink.

"And you'll find that it tastes aqual, for it's not only a smell you shall have of it—it's the rael gintale usquebaugh—a liquor that's too good to be drunk in solitude. 'Tis like love an' fightin' and all the blessed gifts of natur, only to be enjoyed by a couple whose hearts respond to the swate influence of each other's society."

"I'm your man," said Slink, sententially.

"By Saint Moses, yir my friend, sorr!" The pedlar had already tasted the usquebaugh, and his soul was touched with characteristic celerity. "Y'are about the finest Saxon and the bist friend I iver had in my life. Give us your hand, and putt your lips to the delicate mouth of the bottle. If ye hadn't woke me up, by the powers I shouldn't have gone to sleep agin for the rest of the night. I'm about the miserablest man to be alone that iver molested society; but with a companion to talk to and a bottle to drink at—whurroh! pass the darlint to me."

"Will you sing a song now?"

"Will I sing you a song! hunthreds. What shall it be, somethin' meltin and swate like the 'Leather Breeches,' or somethin nate and purty about swateheartin'."

"Sweethearting," said Slink, with a sigh for his lost Jenny.

Without any preliminary hesitation, the pedlar sang an Irish ballad, and with such tenderness, that Slink, who thought of Jenny all the while, was moved to tears at the third verse. Flattered by this tribute to his power the pedlar, who like the rest of his countrymen, was an excellent emotionalist, redoubled his efforts, and absolutely wept in sympathy, when Slink having tried in vain to assuage his tears with the back of his hand, laid his arm on the hay and his face on his arm, and sobbed.

"Take a taste from the bottle, my friend," said the pedlar, when he had finished.

Slink held out his hand, and as he took the bottle, murmured in a voice still choked with grief:

"Now let's have a story."

"Ah, and you're a man after my own heart. Ye'd smole an' soigh by turns. Did y' ever hear of the old woman who lost her darning-needle?"

"No-oh-oh-oh!" answered Slink, laughing in anticipation, as a vague suspicion of the highly diverting circumstances in which she discovered the whereabouts of the missing article flashed across his mind. "No-oh-oh-oh!"

"It's a moighty divarting story, so here goes."

And he went forthwith, telling the simple anecdote with such dry humour that Slink had to hold his sides, cross his legs, and bend double under the painful difficulty of drawing breath, so violent was his laughter—finally in a feeble voice crying, "Don't—don't!" when the pedlar brought his story to the long withheld climax.

After that the pedlar sang "Tom Bowling," and for the sake of good fellowship introduced a chorus of "Derry, derry down," in which Slink exhibited the strength of his lungs with such prodigious effect, that the pedlar thought it wise to let him have the chorus all to himself, and merely marked time with his pipe, while he kept a steady eye on the rafters.

"Y'ave a foine voice, my darlint," said the pedlar, when the song was concluded—"A foine voice for the open air."

"Thank you, master. I'll sing you a song if you like."

"I shall appreciate the obligation. Let it be a throifle subdued, case the landlord should feel onaisey about his property."

Slink nodded, took a drink, wiped his lips, and with the simple announcement, "'Are an' oun's, gents," sang that admirable song, "The Hare and the Hounds." After that the cocks for several miles round awoke and crowed in defiance.

CHAPTER XXX.

BLARNEY.

THE two friends continued their mutual entertainment long after the candle in the lantern had passed away. They could sing, and laugh, and cry just as well without a light as with it: the only difference that the darkness made to them was that the bottle had to be nursed with care, and handed backwards and forwards frequently for an assurance of its safety; but when the bottle was emptied their voices grew feebler, and unconsciously they fell asleep.

For awhile there was peace, but just as the outlines of objects became visible in the opening light of the morning, two shrieks broke the stillness of the hour. Two shrieks in quick succession—the first from the pedlar, the second from Slink—and then followed a hurried dialogue.

"My frind—my frind—have you got ut?"

"Got it? I should think I have—what is it?"

"A rat—a rat. I felt it at my throat. Holy saints! another

moment and my veins would have been sucked—'twas a vampire. I seized um by the throat, and flung it into the atmosphere."

"Yes, and it fell on my shin."

"And what have you done wid it?"

"Nothing. Lord Harry! it's broken my shin."

"And did you let it escape you affther all?"

"Escape me—do you think I see it coming?"

"And was it a vampire or a rat?"

"Rat, no! 'Twas the stone bottle."

"The stone bottle! Saints be praised for their merciful protection—look at that now!"

Slink had less reason to be grateful to the saints: and for some time he was occupied in ascertaining whether his shin-bone was broken or only the skin. However, having been able to walk across the loft with tolerable facility, he felt satisfied that he had nothing to deplore but a bruise, and was returning to his sympathising friend when he slipped his foot and uninjured leg through a hole in the rotten floor, and the pain of having his second shin barked soon made him forget his original injury, which was a merciful dispensation of the all-protecting saints, which the pedlar did not fail to point out to the sufferer.

As it was impossible for Slink to sleep with his shins in such a tender condition that the slightest movement was painful, and as the pedlar was a man who would never sleep if he could get any one to listen to him, and he was sober enough to talk, they reclined and conversed, with a gravity suited to the circumstances, and unavoidable now that the usquebaugh was drunk.

"Y'ave a jewel of a masther, my boy, that'll condescend to make an aqual of ye, and play a friendly hand of cards wid ye now and then."

"Every night."

"Ye gamblin' divels! 'Tis a privilege y' have to be trated like a frind, but maybe its considthered in the wages. How much moight y' have a month, now?"

"I don't know 'zactly, about five shillings a day."

"Foive shilluns a day, darlint! Why 'tis as much as I make in a week, sometimes! An' what do you do wid it all?"

"Lose it at cards."

"Ah! that makes it a bit aisy for the master. And what do you do, now, for your wages?"

"Nothing."

"It is the masther that does the work, maybe?"

Slink was silent; he had been cautioned to hold his tongue with respect to the Lieutenant's occupation, or to speak only in support of his character as an independent gentleman.

"I'raps ye'll tell me if he's a Captun?" pursued the pedlar, with soft persuasiveness.

"He's a cut above a Captain, I can tell you, he's a Lieutenant."

"What, a rale soldier? faith, then, we're as like as twin cherries, for I was a sergeant myself at wan time. And what regiment was he in?"

"You don't suppose he was in a regiment like a common soldier, do you? He was a Lieutenant all to himself; one of the independent Lieutenants."

"I appreciate the distinction, an' I respect the masher for it. I knew he was somethin' out of the common the first mornment I saw him. He's not wan of your civil spokin' maley-mouthed varments; but a rale aristocrat, with a gintle curse and a scowl for anyone that asks him a civil question."

"Yes, that's him."

"The quality, my boy, quality. An' oi'l wager, now, he does nothin' in the world at all but ride about the country brakun the hearts of the female sex and a pickin' their pockuts."

"No, he don't," said Slink, in a tone of feeble opposition.

"Come, my boy, you're thrying to decaive me by sayin' nothun. You don't think I'm a dirty informer, that would sell the gallant Lieutenant to the constables for a paltry reward, do you?"

"Not I."

"Thin whoy should you try to decaive me? 'Tisn't behavin' like yeself at all. I didn't think you would be so mane after sharing my bottle of usquebaugh, and persuadin' me to sit up all the night a singin' ballads to ye, and tellin' all the best stories I knowed."

"I—I—I don't want to be mean. I'm very much obliged to you for your kindness. I—I never enjoyed myself better in all my life, and if I could repay you for your kindness, I would with all my heart."

"But ye can niver repay me, darlint. Disinterested friendship is priceless. So what does the masher do now, ridin' about 'vid a servant at his back?"

"Well, there's a rascal who owes him a lot of money, and—and he's looking about for him, and—and—and he don't seem to quite remember the looks of him, and—and—and when he meets anyone all alone, he just looks in his pocket to see if the money belongs to him, and—and if he's in doubt he takes it."

"I understand the nature of the master's misfortune exactly; and what might you do all the time?"

"Why, I just stand ready to help master, if needs be; for if we meet the right rascal after all, it's more an' likely he'll try to get away without paying?"

"Just precisely so." The pedlar repeated the words again and again, rather than be silent during the period he gave to reflection, then he said: "And y'are moighty fond of the profession, o'il warrant."

Slink sighed.

"Ye like the divilment of it, and the hoigh wages, and the card playin'; and all that." The pedlar waited some time for a response, and getting none, dropped his voice to the most seductive tone of blarney and continued—"Darlint! Oi love ye—oi love ye from the bottom of my heart. If I could do anything to sarve ye o'id spare no ills. Now tell me, tell me true now—wud ye loike another sitiuation?"

Slink after a moment's feverish hesitation, bent over and whispered:

"I can't leave him, God help me."

"Whoy, darlint?"

Slink dared not speak.

"Spake, my dear friend, spake. Trust me now."

"Take your oath you'll tell no one."

"I wud take my dyin' oath a dozen toimes, darlint. Do you think I wud betray ye? Spake and trost me loike your own blessed mother."

"I—I was a simple sort of lad, once."

"And y'are simple, simple as the innocent sheep—g'on darlint."

"And I was so druv up into a corner like with the cruelty of my sweetheart, as I didn't half know what I was doing, and I met the Lieutenant, and he said he was a gentleman wanting a servant, and he persuaded me to run away from the Hall where I was groom, and he made me believe that I had the same right to take the horse I rode as the livery I wore, and when I felt uneasy like about it, he gave me his horse and took mine to make me think I was safe, and then we began to go about the country, and raced the baker——"

"Stop one moment—I don't quite understand the tarmes of the profession—and what do you mane by racing the baker?"

Slink recounted the adventure with the baker, and continued—"So things went on from bad to worse, till I see at last the whole truth when his honour robbed a butcher's wife of sixteen pence, and we had to bolt for our lives when we caught sight

of a couple of constables at our heels. I was for giving back my horse and leaving the master next day, but he wouldn't accept the horse, and swore he would blow my brains out or give me up to the law and have me hanged for horse-stealing, if I didn't keep true to him. And now—I'm a ruined man, and may God forgive me."

"The Lieutenant is a genius—he's got y'under his thumb, very nately. And Ed wagers he's got the real true Irish blood in his veins, for there's no other people that's got their ingenuity. What's his name, Barney?"

"Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe."

"Say it again, darlint." The pedlar, without changing the tone of his voice, spoke with rapidity and evident excitement. "Barnabas Crewe."

"Barney Crewe! Faith 'tis a mighty odd accident. Tell me true now. Do you know anything of his family relations?"

"I have never seen any."

"You never heard him speak of them in his conversation wid ye?"

"We never have any conversation—except at piquet."

"He's got the small-pox, too, an' he moight be about thirty years of age."

"Yes; what of that?"

"You niver heard him spake of anyone? Now, recollect yourself, and don't spake till ye can answer."

"He used to ask a good many questions about my old master," Slink replied, after some minutes of reflection, "and Doctor Blandly."

"Doethor Blandly! An' what was your old master's name?"

"Admiral Talbot."

"Admiral Talbot! Merciful powers! An' has Barney seen the old Admiral?"

"The Admiral's dead."

"An' who's got the foine estate?"

"His son, Master Tom, I think."

"Bad cess to him!"

"What's the matter, master?"

"Nothun—nothun at all."

And with these words the pedlar concluded the conversation, and soon afterwards, without communicating his intention to Slink, he scrambled out of the straw and descended the ladder, leaving his companion in a state of complete mystification and dread.

CHAPTER XXXI.

REVELATION.

THE morning was yet early when Lieutenant Crewe was awoke by the fall of the chair he had set against the lock to keep the door fast.

"Who's there?" he called, shoving his hand under the pillow for his pistol.

"Only me, Barney, darlint," answered the pedlar, showing his head and shoulders.

"If it is only you I shall blow out your brains if you don't take yourself off."

The pedlar withdrew hastily as Barnabas cocked the pistol, and spoke in his blandest tones from the safe side of the door.

"Barney, I've a matter of tremendous importance to communicate to ye. Uncock your pistol, dear boy."

"What's the matter—the horses—Slink?"

"They're slapeing loike the babe in the cot. 'Tis of family affairs I wish to spake wid ye."

"Family affairs?"

"Consarnin the Crewes, and the Talbots, and the Docthor Blandly."

"Come in."

"Uncock your murdering pistol, darlint."

Without uncocking the weapon Barnabas made a sound with the lock as if he had, and slipped the pistol under the blanket. Thieves never feel safe.

"You're safe; come in," he called.

The pedlar entered, and after closing the door, drew near to the bed.

"That's near enough, don't come closer," said Barnabas moving his hand under the blanket.

"Sure you've nothin' to fear from an old mun loike me, and your own counthryman."

"Do you take me for a confounded teague?"

"And by that same token y'are. And what foiner proof could be wanted than your illegant custom of slapeing in your clothes. What's ye got under the blanket?"

"The barker. It's quiet enough when there's no cause to use it. What have you to say?"

"Tell me truly now. Is Barney Crewe your rale name or your professional name?"

"'Tis my own name."

"And what age might ye be? Moind I'm pavin' these questions for your own sake, me dear boy."

"I take it I'm about eight-and-twenty."

"Do you remember either your father or your mother?"

"No."

"Now, look at me full in the face. Does your bowels yearn towards me?"

"No."

"Now doesn't an angel's voice same to whisper to ye that I'm all the kith and kin y'e'ver had in the world that's left to ye?"

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Can you rade, Barney?" asked the pedlar, bringing a snuff-box from his pocket.

"No."

"That's another proof that y' are a blessed son of St. Patrick. If you could rade you would see that the name engravin' on the back of this box, that was presented to me by your own mother, is—Barney Crewe."

"What are you driving at?"

"Barney, you bear the same name as mine because y'are my eldest son—by your mother. And now take yer hand from the slaughtering pistol and embrace me."

"No, thank you."

"Y'ave the cold Saxon blood in your veins—your mother's blood, and she was a cold and calculatin woman as iver drew the blessed breath of life. Ye'll break me heart with your cruelty, ye will."

The father wiped his eyes.

"Don't let's have any confounded nonsense. Here, take this piece and fetch a noggin of rum."

"Sure it's the blessed voice of my own flesh and blood that spakes that same. Will y'ave any wather to spoil the gift of Natur', darlint?"

"Oh, curse the water; the innkeeper takes care that we shall have enough of that."

"Good again. Y'are Irish to the backbone of ye."

While the father hurried off to get the required spirit, his son renewed the priming of his pistol, set it where it could be reached at a moment, and slipping out of bed made all the toilet that was necessary to him—in a word, he pulled on his boots.

The names mentioned by the pedlar had rekindled his desire to know why Doctor Blandly made the annual payment to him and Gerard, a desire which had lately dwindled in the entire absence of any element to sustain it. He hoped to discover in

the circumstances of his birth some fact which would enable him to turn the tables on Doctor Blandly, and force him to increase the sum he paid with such reluctance.

The pedlar quickly returned with the rum, but he would not spoil the pleasure of drinking it by a line of conversation which might engross their thoughts too deeply. He confined himself to general remarks until the cup was drained, then he returned to the subject which Barnabas was now eager to pursue.

"Barney, my boy, I've somethun to tell you av moighty importance. Ye must know that I've had the honour of slapein' in the same chamber wid your valet, an' a proud moment it was when I diskivered that it was my own son that kept a sarvent and horses, an' did nothin' in the world but ride about the country like a gentleman. He's a dacent sort of a boy, your valet, but ye give him too much liberty, Barney, and any wan but your own father would have persuaded him to turn King's evidence agin ye for the paltry reward offered for the apprehension of the likes of you."

"What has he told you—confound him?"

"Nothun' at all, nothun' in the world. But be careful wid him, darlint."

"Go on."

"When I larnt your name I just descended into the fresh air and took a stroll up an down under the blessed sky of heaven till the man opened the house, and all the time I was a-thinkun', Barney, and a-thinkun, with all the power of my mind, and I said intarnally, 'There's the hand of a merciful Providence in all this, and somethin's to be made out of ut, or my name's not Barney O'Crewe.' But first and foremost, my boy, we must have no resarve, we must riv'rance the holy tie that binds us together—father and son, and kape no secrets. So before I whisper a word ye'll just understand that we're to go halves, share and share alike in the blessed gifts that Providence may shower upon us."

"Halves; all right." Barnabas saw no objection to making promises which only his word could bind him to keep.

"I'll trust ye, Barney, I'll trust ye becace y'are my own son, and becace it'll be to your own interest to kape your word. Now, tell me true, darlint, do you know your own brother?"

"Gerard? Little enough. He's in London, living the life of a lord, and a beggarly guinea or two now and then is all I get out of him."

Barney O'Crewe reflected a moment, then—

"And that's all you know about your brother?" he said.

"That's all."

"And Doctor Blandly—what do you know of him?"

"He gives me two hundred a year, and threatens to stop it if I don't humble myself like a cur when I go and take the quarterly allowance."

"And d'ye happen to know what he pays you the money for?"

"No—that is—no."

"Don't decave me, darlint; y' hesitated. What was you about to spake?"

"I believe he pays it to me not on his own account, but for some one else."

"Misther Talbot, the son of the Admiral?"

"Yes."

"An' you don't know what for he pays it?"

"No. I tried to find out, but the old scoundrel promised to stop payment if I ever put a word of inquiry to Mr. Talbot, and he'd do it too."

"An' you know nothin' of Misther Talbot?"

"Nothing. I'm told that he spends his time travelling in foreign parts."

"Y'ave never made an inquiry at Talbot Hall?"

"No; I'm afraid to do that for fear of Doctor Blandly."

"Parney, darlint, I'll tell ye a little story, and every word on it as true as the blessd saints."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A RETROSPECT.

"WHEN I was a young man, a trifle younger than you, I was a thunderin' handsome boy as ye could mate wid of a summer's day. If ye look at me a bit you'll see the traces of a foine fellow. There's a curl in my hair, my teeth are still whoite and good, and my eyes have a roguish twinkle in 'em: for the rest of my features, they've suffered by hard work and my sorriers. I was a dashun, dare-devil boy, with nothun' in the world but my good looks, my impudence, and my blarney, and seein' that I was a soight too good for county Cork, I engaged myself as body sarvant to a foine gentleman going to London town. Wan night, when my masther was laid up wid a hole in his side that he'd got from another foine gentleman he'd called out in a duel, I took a holiday, and wishin' to appear like a rale gentleman, I borrowed his clothes and went out in 'em. As I

was strolling along the Mall in all the majesty of man, I passed a swate widder. She was nayther young nor beautiful, but she looked prosperous, and a saucy leer in her eye seemed to whisper to my soul that she'd more property than she knew what to do wid alone. Says I to myself, 'Barney, my darlint, there's the wife that's waitin for ye.'

"I walked on a hundred yards and then turned round. She'd turned round aqually, and when we drew nair she dropped her fan, which I picked up wid all the grace imaginable, and presented to her wid an iligant spach—which my own masther would have been proud to have spaken. Ye may be sure I didn't lose the opportunity which Providence had given me, and before I left her I had talked all I knew about hearts and darts, and Cupids and Vanuses, and perishin' and languishin,' an' all what I'd heard my masther sayun in similar situations, and made an appointment to meet her the next day. She wanted me to write a letter, but I wodn't agree to ut, for writin a letter would have placed me in a moighty awkward predicament, seeing I didn't know the letter A from a bull's fut. I towld the swate cratur that my passion was too strong for writun, and I must see her and spake to her wid my eyes or parish in despair.

"That's the way you must spake to the female sex to plase 'em. Thank the powers, my masther's wound grew worse instead of better, and so I contrived to mate the widder again and again in his foine embroidered clothes, and I made love to her just for all the world as if I maned it. And so matters went on flourishing until the masther's wound grewed aisier, and he began to suspect me, and I saw that I must make my hay all of a hurry afore the storm came.

"I was not wrong in my ideas; the widder was prosperous. Her husband had left her two thousand pounds and an iligant shop in the drapery business. So as there was no time to lose, I proposed to the swate crater, and married her the very day my masther got well enough to kick me out of the house, borrowin' a suit of clothes for the occasion of a gintleman that made it his trade to buy up old coats of the gentry's sarvints. The widder was moighty surprised when she found that I had nothun at all in the wurd but the clothes I stood in, and them not my own; but she was too much bot'hered with love to take a thrifle like that to heart, and before a week was over she had forgiven me everything, and was plesed to let me have all that I naded, includin' a pocke full of money. So then I was a rale gentleman, Barney, wid nuthun to do but to spend the widder's money, get drunk, and make love to the gals.

"I hadn't been married more than a month when I fell desperat in love with a charming cratur, who played the pieces with delicate sentiment at the King's Theatre in Covent Garden. Her name was Patty Davie, and I till you true, Barney, that I cried till I was ashamed of myself in sympathy with her virtue and innocence when I saw her representin' Ophalia. I loved her the first time I saw her, and to the vorey last I loved her sincerely and hardly anyone better. I bought her jewels, I bought her fine dresses, I lavished the widder's money upon her as if it was wather.

"But, unfortunately that could not go on for ever, and wan day I had to leave the widder for ever because of a writ that was out against me for debt, which she had not the money to discharge, bad cess to her! I never see her agen."

"Then what has she got to do with my affairs?" asked Barnabas.

"Nothun, darlint."

"What on earth is the use of wasting time about her?"

"Don't be s' impatient, my boy. Sure it's plasing to you to know that your father's been a rale gentleman."

"Let me know something of the matter that you told me was of importance."

"I'm comun to ut, Barney. Ye must know I had my roivals, and amongst 'em was a captun—a post captun in the navy. Captun Talbot, a man quite young, loike myself, but with no more knowledge of the world than a babe. He'd tuk to the sea as a boy and never left it except when he came home from a voyage, and so it was only reasonable that he should be innocent and simple, and tender-hearted; but he was about as strong as a lion, and just as ready to fight.

"Now, Patty was as foine an actress off the stage as she was upon ut, and when I towld her that the game was pleyed out and the bailiffs was after me, she made up at once to young Captun Talbot, and leavin' me with a laugh at one side of the stage, went round to him at t'other with her eyes full of tears and a moighty touching story of her innocence and temptations, and the want of some lovun' soul to shield her from the bitter hardships of her lonely life. I'll tell you her motive, Barney—she expected you to come into the world before many months, and she wanted to find another father for you as could give you a home worthy of you, my boy: a name and a fortune, such as you deserved—do you take my maning?"

"I understand—go on."

"Now, Captun Talbot was a widderer. He had married three years before ever he see Patty, and his wife died

in giving birth to her first and only child—a son christened Thomas.

“I know—well?”

“The son grew strong and hearty, but the father bein’ forced to go a-travelling about on the seas, was oblaiged to leave him to the tender mercies of a nuss. Patty saw the son, then two year old, and cried her eyes out over him, and the Captain, touched by her delicate performance, ast her if she would be a mother to his boy, and give up the stage and all her London friends to live in the country as his wife. Patty wanted nothun better, so she lifted up her face all streamun with tears and kissed him for a reply. The scane took place in her dressing-room, where the Captain had come wid a bit of a girl carrying the babe—come so suddintly that I had only just time to slip behind a long hooped gownd that hung in a corner.

“Well, Barney, the next day I was nabbed by the bums and put into the Fleet for a debt of four hundred pounds. It was three years before I got out, and havun’ nothun’ in my pocket—and nothun’ in my stomach by the same token—my first thoughts were of Patty, and that day I walked to Sevenoaks with nought but wather and crusts to eat on the way, and at night I rang the bell at the gates of Talbot Hall. It naided all the parsevairance of my characether to obtain an interview. When I did I found Patty as white as a ghost, sittin’ wid you at her feet struggling to get at the cat with your silver rattle—y’ had a foine spirit on you even then, Barney, and your brother Gerard at her breast, whoile the Captain’s eldest son, Thomas, was sitting in a chair by your brother’s side. Patty rang the bell, and had Masther Tom taken away, ’case he was foive years old, and children’s moighty forrard talking about what’s not naided; then she says, ‘Mr. O’Crews,’ she says, ‘what do you want?’ I towld her as I loved her sincairely, and begged her to pack up her jowels and fly wid me to a happy and blissful hoame. She refused p’int blank, and I shed tears at her ingratitude and infidelity. She said she had done wrong, but she would make reparation by living a good life, and being a dacent mother to her husband’s children. Though I loved her sincairely, I lost my temper, and I said, ‘Keep your husband’s children, but I’ll have mine,’ and with that I caught hold of you, my boy.’ ‘Oh, my God,’ she cried, ‘What are you going to do?’ ‘I am going to take my child away,’ says I, ‘and if Captun Talbot asks for him, you can send him to me for an explanation.’ That brought your mother to raison. ‘How much money do you want to leave me in peace

with my children?' she asked. Well, my boy, I tuk a few pounds and an iligant jewel she wore at her throat to go on wid, and I forgave her wid a free heart, and left her in pace, she implorin' me not to come again, as every day she expected her husband to return. I promised, and made up my mind to kape my word, case I should ruin the game by playin' reckless. But, onfortunately, I have, I must admit ut candidly, I have wan fault."

"Ah! drink."

"No, Barney, that is not a fault. My fault is, that when I'm dronk I lose my sober senses. Well, when, after livin' in a neighbouring tavern like a lord for a month, wan day I happened to be a little bit onder the influence of the blessed gift of natur', I tuk ut into my head that I would go up to the Hall and get a few pounds. I rang the bell, and a man came from the porter's lodge with his collar turned high up, for it was devilish rainy weather. I was almost bloind drunk, Barney, and when he asked me what I wanted, I was too busy holdin' myself up by the gate-post to look at um much, so I said, 'I want to see Patty—Mrs. Talbot,' and I laughed.' 'Do you know your way?' he asked, with devilish cunning, and I, loike a poor, simple, guileless soul, answered, 'To be sure I do; I only wish I had as many silver shilluns as I knew my way.' He opened the gate for me, and in I staggered, like a blessed lamb into the shambles. I rowled up to the house, and gown in by the sarvints' entrance, as was natral to me, I tumbled up the stairs, and bust into the room where Patty was sittun. 'Great Heavens!' cries Patty, 'leave the house at once, my husband has sent me a message tellun as his ship's in port, and he will be wid me this night.' I nodded and says, 'I met the messenger at the lodge, and a decent sort of a crater he seems. Give me some money, and I'll go away at once.' She giv me a purse, but I happened to ketch the sparkle of an iligant ring on her finger, and the divil was in me to have that too. 'Darlint,' I says, 'ye'll give me the jowil that twinkles brougt as your beautiful eyes on your finger.' 'No,' says she; 'he giv ut me, and he'll want to know what's gone of it; ye shan't have ut,' she says. 'As you like,' says I, 'but if I can't have the ring, I'll have my own flesh and blood. I'll have my dear, swate little Thaophilus to bagin wid,' and I ketched hold of you, for Thaophilus was the name she'd giv you, my boy; but you worr a moighty onamiable chyild, and ye began to scrame thunder and blazes, when the door opened and in came the man in the long coat as ud opened the gate to me. 'Marciful powers!' scamed Patty, dropping down on

the flure, 'my husband!' He'd followed me and heard all my indiscretion."

"Confound you, for a drunken old fool! 'Tis you, then, that :tined me!" cried Barnabas, jumping up from the bedside and stamping his foot.

"Don't be cross wid your own old father, Barney. . . listen, darlint, and your heart will melt wid pity for me, like a roll of butther under the gentle influence of the blessed sun Widout a word of koindness the Captun screwed his knuckles into the nape of my neck, and as I drop'd you, implorun him to be merciful, he lifted me out of the room, marched me down the droive, and bundled me into the porter's lodge, givun a word or two to the porter. I thought he maned laving me there and sendin' for a constable to take me off to the stocks for a rogue and a vagabind, and I thanked the merciful saints for protectun me in the moriment of adversity; but I was mistaken, Barney, and presently recaived a warnun that I shan't forget till my last hour, never to thank the saints before y'are certain sure they have done somethun to be thankful for, for sure they'll chate you if they can. Whoile the porter was absent the Captun took off his coat, and when the porter came back agen he'd a length of rope in his hand, a rope, Barney, darlint, not very thick, but as hard as nails. The Captun he doubles the rope, puts a knot in each end, and twisted the doubled length round his hand, leavun the two ends about two feet long. 'Captun, darlint,' I says, 'what are you go'in to do wid the rope?' He didn't condescend to give me a worrd in reply, but he tuk me by the collar agen, holden me just so that I couldn't move no more than if I was in a pillory, and with that awful instrumnt of torture he bate me, and he bate me till my coat and breeches was in rags, and I swowned right off wid agony and suffering, 'twas no sham swownd, for he bate me till I couldn't holler, and when I racovered I was lyun in a ditch. Barney, darlint, I've the marks of that bating on my body now."

"I'm glad of it; serves you right!"

"Y'are an onnatural choild. Where's the Irish blood I guv you?"

"Finish your story."

"Won't you guv me a drop of rum, darlint? 'Talkin' with a dry mouth is moighty difficult."

"You shall have a noggin when you come to the end of the tale."

"I'll be as spadey as possible. You may rest aisey that I didn't go back to Talbot Hall in a hurry after the infliction of

that thremenjous bating. I didn't go anigh the place for three months, and only then beca'se I was druv to it by extrame necessity. I had nothing in the world at all, Barney, darlint, but the tatters of my garmints and the scars on my back, and when I approached the Hall it was with a thremblin' in every blessed limb of my body and my taeth likewise, and then I didn't go nearer than the tavern, where only a short toime before I had been a livin' like a prince. Wad ye believe it, they wouldn't sarve me with a paltry mug of ale? Instead of giving me comfort, they added to my misery by telling me that the Hall was empty—that Captun Talbot had took his wife and the childer away no one knew where. In bither disappointment I returned to London with all my tendher feeluns, and the yearnin's of my soul ongratified. Three months more passed before by a marcifful Providence I was brought face to face wid my darlint Patty. At forst she would have nothun to say to me; but I parsevered, Barney—I followed her till I found out where she lived, and then I brought the swate cratur to raison by threatenen to take my dear Barney away from her; for I knew a dacent chimney-sweeper who was willun to purchase the likes of you for a thrifle to educate to the pra-fession of climbing chimnies. Then she towld me that I had ruined her. Her husband—they'd made an admiral of um, and sure if he bate his counthry's enemies as he bate his own he desarved the promotion—had taken his eldest son, Tom, that he had by his first wife away, and given her an annual income of four hunthred pounds a yaar, conditionally that she abandoned his name and rachristened your brother and you, and niver attempted to see him agen. He disowned you, which was not to be wondered at considering what had tuk place, but he likewise disowned Gerard; for you see nothun Patty could say would make um believe that she had been true to him since her marriage. He had proofs that I visited the Hall, and I myself had unfortunately towld um that I knew the way par-fictly well. He said that if you were my son, Gerard was moine also; though he was not, as the holy saints knows full well for the truth, seein' I was in the 'leet for nigh two year before ever he saw the light of day. The money was paid to your mother, as 'tis paid to you, through Doethor Blandly. He was a young man then, and as handy with the 'use of a rope's-end as his friend the Admiral, so I had to be careful and kape clear of um. But still I managed to live tolerable aisey wid what I could get, which was a decent percentage on all your blessed mother had; and I had larnt to be continted with thrifles, I could have gone on livin' in the same manner all

the rest of my days, and died a peaceful old gentleman; but fortune was cruel against me. Ye caught the small-pox, Barney, darlint; but y'are my own son, and I will not reproach ye--ye caught the small-pox bad, and for fear I might take the disease and add to the troubles of your mother, I tuk what there was in the house and left it to jine a swateheart of mine who was thravelling round the counthry wid a company of players. I was always moighty fond of the theater. When I come back I found your mother had tuk the small-pox in nussen you, and died of ut just as you recovered. 'Twas an inspiration that warned me to lave the house when I did, and ye see plainly, darlint, how the blessed saints watched over and protected us. Doethor Blandly, I was towld, by the same token, had removed you and your half-brother Gerard; and there was not a rap left for me. I have never seen Gerard since, nor you till this blessed morn, and havin' finished the history so far as consarns you, if you've no abjection we'll take the noggin of rum you were spakun about."

"Give you a noggin!--what for? Do I owe you anything but a curse for having ruined me by your meddling and interfering with my mother after she was married?"

The old man looked at his son without the slightest malice. A smile stole over his face, and his eyes twinkled with a knowledge of his own superior cunning.

"Y'ave a swate sperit on you, Barney, darlint; but y'are a fool. Y'are loike an innocent pig that's dying to get at the meal, but hasn't the sense to ontie the string and crawl into the sack."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"I am that dry wid telling ye the truth that I couldn't spake another word widout a taste of the blessed gift o' natur."

Barnabas puzzled his dull brains in trying to see what advantage could be derived from his recently acquired knowledge, and then reluctantly handed the pence to his father with a feeble hope that he might receive value for the money.

After a brief interval the old pedlar returned from his expedition to the bar-parlour, with a measure of rum, which the two drank, and then seeming greatly refreshed, he wiped his lips with the back of his hand briskly, and said:

"Now, Barney, where's your brother Gerard?"

"In London."

"In London, and can you tell me where now?"

"No," replied Barnabas with emphasis, detecting his father's eagerness to know,

"'Tis a pity. London's a large place; but faith we'll find um if he's to be found."

"And what then?"

"We'll make a bargain wid um before ever we tell um a word."

"Supposing he won't come to terms, and that is more than likely."

"Then we'll just do widout him. We'll find Mr. Talbot, and you'll go to him wid a nice clean face, and say, 'Tom, I'm your brother, and my heart's a yearnin' towards ye, and I most live wid ye or die,' and if Doethor Blandly says y'are not, ye'll just quiet and aisey speaking ask him to prove that you're not."

Barnabas took some time to comprehend the full meaning of the hint, then :

"And suppose he does prove it?"

"He can't. The Admiral was ashamed of what had tuk place—Patty towld me so, and said as how it was a blot upon the fair history of the family—and for that reason he never whispered a word of it to a sowl except Doethor Blandly. The Admiral's dead, and what proof agen you is the word of the ould Doethor, who maybe for his own reasons is intherested in keeping you out of the family? There y'are by law his son and Thomas Talbot's brother."

Barnabas slapped his thigh, and grinned; his father, encouraged by this flattering mark of appreciation, proceeded :

"He can't deny ye. Ye stand there Thaophilus Talbot. He dare not forbid ye to enter your father's house, and when y'are wance inside, my boy, ye may puzzle the devil and Doethor Blandly together to get ye out."

"But suppose," Barnabas urged, biting his nail at the same time, "suppose he does forbid me to enter the house, and uses the same kind of argument his father used with you, how will that be?"

"Bad for you, darlint. But y'have nothun of the koind to fear. Doubting the thing he's towld for true, he daren't lift his hand agen you, with the possibility of disgracin' his father's son. And look here now, agen, supposun and supposun all you like, y'have still the mather hand of him. If he says ye shan't cross the threshold of Talbot Hall, nor ye shan't have a farden of his money, you'll say, 'Brother Tom, yer cruelty will force me to take to the road, and if I'm caught, it's Thaophilus Talbot will be tried, and you'll have the satis'faction of quarthering Tyburn-tree upon your scutcheon.'"

Barnabas nodded assent.

"For his father's sake, for the honour of his fam'ly, he daren't let the sacret be made public, wid no better result than saving a few pounds. No, my boy, ye'll set your fut in Talbot Hall, and ye'll never lave ut, and it's the foine feastun and drinkun we'll have there."

"We! What have you got to do with it?"

"Sure, darlint, yo' won't kick away the poor old ladder that's helped ye to mount up to the top of your fortune."

"Won't I! we shall see." Barnabas laughed, and then confident in his ability to do in future without his father, added, "You shouldn't have told me so much without first providing for yourself."

"Faith, and I've done the same, darlint," murmured the old man, with a most oily suavity in his tone.

Barnabas ceased to laugh.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Ye can't do widout me, darlint, seein' that I would claim ye for my own son if ye could demane yourself to forget me. I'm full of tender feeluns for you, and I'll never laave ye whoile y'are tender and true to me. Couldn't I have persuaded your poor ignorant sarvint to run away wid me and turn King's evidence, and sowld ye to the constables whoile ye was shapeing so swately in your bed? Couldn't I go now to Doethor Blandly, and promise for a thrifle to go agen ye in a court of law, if ye made yourself onplaisant? And wouldn't I if I wasn't wise enough to howld on to my own blessed son while he kapes up his characther dacently?"

"You've got the cunning of old Nick," growled Barnabas.

"Thank ye, darlint, for the compliment; the same to you."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PREMEDITATION.

"THERE'S your change, and there's your sturrups," said the landlord of the "Lone Crow," when Barnabas, after breakfast, signified his intention of departing. "Fair and square, and two ha'peneys for a penny's my motter, and no hitting below the belt."

At a sign from his master, Slink took the stirrups, and went away to saddle the horses, and soon after returned with them to the back-door of the inn, where Barnabas stood beside the pedlar, who was talking with his customary volubility, but in a subdued tone.

Slink was mystified and apprehensive. As yet his master had not spoken a word, good or bad, to him, but that did not lessen the dread aroused by his finding him on intimate terms of friendship with the pedlar who had betrayed him into a confession.

While Barnabas was putting his pistols in their holsters, the pedlar, who had caught a menacing glance from Slink, came to his side and said in a low voice:

"I've been spakin' a good word wid the masther for ye, my boy. Ye'll foind that he'll trate ye wid more considtheration in futur'."

Slink's gratitude was expressed in a rapid nod, a smile, a wink, and a grip of the hand extended to him; then he followed his master's example and sprang in the saddle.

"God bless ye, Barney, darlint," said the wily old man, going to the side of Barnabas. "'Tis a moighty foine figure ye cut astride of your horse, and I'm proud of ye. Ye'll kape an eye on the boy behint ye. Trost no man but your owld father, that loves ye so darelly. In three weeks' toime ye'll mate me here agen and tell me true how ye prosper. Ye know what to do in the manewhoile, and ye ondersthand that ye kin do nothun widout me. Farewell, my darlint, and 'tis a chareful time we'll have at the old hall of your ancisthers."

Barney nodded, and touched his horse's side with his heel. The Walloper had contrived to open his gate, and launched a final motto as his guests passed out.

"Always glad to meet you, Captain; within the rules. Fair give and take, and part friends—there you are."

Without responding to this honest sentiment, Barnabas jerked the rein, and taking the London road, trotted along in sombre meditation.

When they had gone some distance, he smacked his boot with his whip, and at the signal Slink came to his side.

"You can't learn to hold your tongue, it seems," said Barnabas.

"What have I said, master?"

"Enough to hang you. If the pedlar hadn't been a particular friend of mine you would have been in gaol by this time. You thought you could sell me, didn't you? Don't tell a lie, you would. But I shouldn't swing; it was you who stole this horse, and sold it to me for the one you are on. You may be thankful for your escape. I'm too kind to you, that's the fact. You will sleep in the same room with me in future."

"I wish I had never been born!" whimpered Slink, "my life's a misery to me. Here, master, take my horse, and every-

thing I have, and let me go free as I was the day you met me first."

"Oh, no, I've not done with you yet. Look here," tapping a holster, "if you attempt to leave me, you know what will happen."

This threat, which at one time had made Slink tremble with fear, seemed to make but little impression on him now: it had been repeated often, and his fear of death was diminished greatly by the wretchedness of living.

"It's all for your own good," continued Barnabas: "haven't I made a man of you? At one time you used to blubber like a big girl at the sight of a pistol, and feared every man you came near for a constable; no wonder your sweetheart would have nothing to say to you. A woman wants a man for her husband, and I'll warrant when you go to your wench with a dare-devil look on your face, she'll be civiler to you than ever she's been before."

"Do you think so, master?"

"Of course I do. Besides, I shall put a lot of money into your pocket before long, and what maid would say no to you then? You do all I bid you, and before a month's out you'll be as rich as a lord and as free as the wind."

"Does your honour mean it?"

"I'll take my oath on it. But mind—you must do whatever you're told to do without hesitation—and you must help me."

"You don't want me to—to——"

"No, I don't. The work I've got for you is as innocent as singing hymns."

"Your honour won't find me backward at doing anything of that sort; I'm wonderful fond of singing. Master Twist, the music-man, told parson I'd the best voice in the parish, so parson said, 'Let's have 'n in the choir, for the music hasn't pleased me for a long while.' So Master Twist, he put I in the choir, and Monday morning he ax'd parson whether he's zatisfied. 'No,' says the parson, 't ain't right now; but I've found out what's the matter—there's too much music; take away the big fiddle.' So Master Twist took the big fiddle away, and nex' Monday he ax'd parson agen if he wurr zatisfied. 'No,' says parson, 'there's too much row; you must take half they b'ys away.' So Master Twist took six of the b'ys away, and nex' Monday morning he ax'd parson if he wurr zatisfied now. 'No,' says parson; 'it's the gals that makes the noise—take them away.' So Master Twist took the gals away, and nex' Monday morning he ax'd if he wurr zatisfied. 'No,' says parson, 'there's too many b'ys.' So Master Twist took all the

other b'ys away, and there was only me and him with the flute left, and nex' Monday morning he ax'd parson if he wurr satisfied, just the same as before. 'It's better,' says parson, 'and it would be better still if the choir was up in the belfry.'

"Have you done?" asked Barnabas.

Slink looked at his master's scowling face, and conscious of the indiscretion into which he had been led by that first faint glimpse of amiability on the part of his master, blushed up to the eyes and nodded his head.

"In that case you can hold your noise until you're asked to speak again."

Slink smothered a sigh and dropped in the rear, with his head bent in conscious disgrace.

Left to his own reflections, Barnabas turned over in his mind all that he had heard from his father, and the suggestions he had made, which were pleasant, as offering the prospect of gain to himself, but unpalatable in other respects. The greedy, dull scoundrel wanted all for himself, and was unwilling that anyone should share with him the ill-gotten profit.

"What has my father done that he should have a penny from Talbot?" his thoughts ran. "He has done me an injury in reducing me to my present position by his drunken folly. I'm not the blind fool he takes me to be. I see clearly enough that he would have me under his thumb, as he had my mother, if I gave him the chance. By threatening to blow on me he would extort all that I get, and likely enough in another drunken fit he would blab the truth, and ruin me as he ruined my mother. Then what would happen?"

"I should be kicked out and the payment made by Doctor Blandly stopped as a reward for my pains. I won't trust my father if I can help it; but how can I do without him, or in opposition to him. He has only to show himself to the Doctor and tell him all to upset me. To spite me and get a bottle of rum he would do anything. . . .

"He says that my birth was concealed for a couple of months before it was registered in the parish books, in order to avoid Admiral Talbot's suspicions. That registry would establish my claims against all that Doctor Blandly could say; but suppose the Admiral, to conceal what he called his disgrace, had the passage scratched out. No, he couldn't do that. I suppose I could see the register and make sure. But that would be nothing if Doctor Blandly and my father combined to undo me. I may have to buy him over to my side after all.

"But then Gerard will have an equal right, curse him. That makes three of us to divide what Talbot chooses to allow

us, which may be little enough after all. Board and lodging, perhaps, and no more. A fine treat that. I can make no legal claim upon this Talbot, and if he doesn't like my ways he may just start me off about my business, and I should have no redress. If the Admiral made a will and left the property to his son Thomas, it's his, and no one can take it from him. At the best I shall be dependent on his generosity, and have to truckle and bend before him like a servant, while Gerard, with his dainty face and white hands, and 'haw, haw' here, and 'ha ha' there, will be his favourite, and get all the good that is to be got. A fine piece of justice truly, when I shall have to manage father and supply him with what he demands. Yes, Gerard will take the cream, while I must share the whey with the old man. The dirty work and no reward worth having! Plague take me, a fine bargain that is! Better to put up with a couple of hundred a year and be free; I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that Gerard gets no more, and disappoint the old man with all his cunning. . . .

"But I can't let the prize lie there and not make a grab for it. There's a way to get it if one only knew how. I'll be bound my father could put me up to the means if it were not to his own disadvantage. There must be some way of doing it. One needn't cut down an apple tree to get at the fruit. How can it be done. If I had only my father's brains instead of his blood I'd be better contented. If I found Mr. Talbot, and feigned to be prodigiously honest, told him all and threw myself upon his generosity, I should be likely to get more than by my father's scheme, besides shutting him out from any advantage. But then Gerard would come in and get ten times as much as I should. I don't like that scheme. It doesn't release me from the dependency upon Talbot. . . .

"I wonder where he is. The other end of the world perhaps—dead for all I know. How would that be if he were——"

He reined in his horse suddenly for no obvious reason, and halted in the middle of the road.

"Do you want me, master?" asked Slink, coming to his side.

"No, and be hanged to you. Keep behind," answered Barnabas, touching his horse angrily, and then curbing it up with savage ferocity to a walking pace.

He continued the journey for some time at that pace, while he considered what his position might be if Tom Talbot were dead.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ROUSING THE LION.

It was the 25th of June, and the object of Barnabas Crowe's present journey to Edmonton was, as may be imagined, to receive the quarterly allowance from Doctor Blardly. He put himself upon his best behaviour, and took the fifty pounds in agreeable silence, and without testing the quality of each piece by the process of ringing on the table or biting between his teeth, as had hitherto been his custom. When he rejoined Slink at "The Bell," he called for a modest quart of ale, and shared it fairly with his servant, which was an exceptional act of generosity, and a wholesome departure from his usual habit of debauching himself by the speediest means to be procured. After paying for the ale he counted his money, and buttoned it up carefully in his pocket as he left the inn.

"Slink," said he, when they were once more on the road, "which road do you know to Sevenoaks?"

Slink looked at his master in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Well, fool?" asked Barnabas.

"I don't know my way from London, master."

"Where do you know your way from, then?"

"From Maidstone, or Chizzlehurst, or Bromley."

"Do you know your way from Gravesend?"

"Yes, by Wrotham and Ightham."

"Wrotham I know: where's Ightham?"

"A few miles further on, and about seven from Sevenoaks."

"Savage kind of place thereabouts, isn't it?"

"A village, your honour: not very savage, two inns."

"Any houses between there and Sevenoaks?"

"A few, not many, master. There's Knole Park."

"Ah, Knole; that lies between Ightham and Talbot Hall?"

"Yes, your honour."

"Then now for Gravesend. . . . What are you blubbering about?"

"You're not going nigh Talbot Hall, are you, master?"

"Yes. Is there anything terrible in that?"

"We shall be lost, that's all. Hanged, nothing more. Master Blake, the steward, knows your horse as well as I do."

"Hum! that might get me into trouble. I must manage to exchange him on the road."

"But Master Blake knows me just as well as the horse."

"Then you'll have to keep a smart look-out. Fall back."

They had passed Durtford before Barnabas made any sign of wishing to renew the conversation, then he made the usual signal, and Slink came to his side, touching his hat, but looking straight before him with heavy eyes and a woebegone expression on his face. Barnabas, after looking at him for a minute in mute disgust, said :

"What a blameful, hang-dog looking hound you are."

"I can't help it, master."

"Sit straight in your saddle, hold your head up, now look as if your life depended on your pluck, fancy you have Tyburn in front of you, and a batch of snap-jacks at your heels."

Slink turned sharply and looked behind him, with a falling lip and chattering teeth.

"Bah! you make a man ill to look at you!"

Barnabas gave a cut at Slink's horse with his whip, causing the animal to make such a bound as nearly unseated the rider. Slink had no fear of horses, and showed considerable spirit in subduing the restive beast.

"Ah! now you look like a man. I hate your sneaking, snivelling faces, and so do women. When we come upon a barber's you'll have that shock of hair trimmed up smart, and if there's e'er a haberdasher's in Gravesend you'll buy yourself a pair of riding-gloves and a jaunty cravat; I suppose you ought to have a new pair of boots. Well, there's a piece of gold for you, and to-morrow morning let me see you as spruce as a carrot, with your hat cocked on your ear, your chin up, a flower-bud or a straw in your mouth, and a devil-may-care carriage. D'ye hear?"

"Better tell me again, master," said Slink, not sure whether he had heard correctly.

Barnabas repeated his instructions, and Slink, with undiminished amazement, asked :

"What's all that for, master?"

"I want you to see that sweetheart of yours, and what is more, I want her to see you."

"But, your honour, if——"

"Speak when you're told to speak. To-morrow we shall push on to the village you spoke of; there I shall stop while you go on to Talbot Hall. Curse that face! look the other way, if you can't show me a better. You'll go to Talbot Hall—a-foot if you like—and hang about until you have a chance of seeing your sweetheart alone. Then you'll put on the air of a man, and I warrant she'll listen to you. You shall buy her a shawl or brooch at Gravesend and give it to her, and while you're making love you'll just find out in what part of the

world Mr. Talbot is travelling, and you won't leave her until, by fair means or foul, you've found out. Don't face her with a blush and a sickening stammer; stick out your lip, strut up to her like a cockerel, chuck her under the chin, and laugh at her if she puts on her fine airs. I wager a crown to a penny she'll part from you with a sigh, and never rest till she sees you again."

Slink's face expanded into a broad grin of satisfaction; and as his imagination dwelt upon the part he was to play, he gave his hat a shake, tilting it on one side, stuck out his chin and his nether lip, and assumed a rakish air, which was ludicrous enough in conjunction with his soiled and tattered neck-cloth and his red hair, which stuck out in a fluffy thicket three pairs round his head.

"That's it," said Barnabas, encouragingly, "look like that and you'll carry the heart of any woman, when you're trimmed up a bit. You don't lack courage!"

"Not I," responded Slink, "I'm bold enough, if I can only get the fears out of my head."

"That's the way, man! To-morrow you won't be the same fellow your sweetheart sent about his business."

"You're right, master. I've been thinking over what you said yesterday, and I made up my mind to be more of a man next time I face Jenny. She shall see what sort of a lover she has to deal with now, if I can only catch her alone. I shan't be afraid if I can go on foot, because I needn't stick to the roads when I see anyone coming, and can skip off behind a hedge if I hear a sound."

CHAPTER XXXV.

SWEETHEARTS.

PRIMED with instructions, Slink left his master at Ightham, and took the road to Sevenoaks in high spirits. He had carried out his master's instructions to the letter, and with a clean face, a new neck-cloth, a pair of sound boots, well brushed coat and breeches, gloves, and a head reduced in its colour to natural proportions by a removal of the superfluous hair and a generous application of grease to the remainder, he looked as decent a young countryman as one would wish to see. In addition there was a certain rakishness in his air and carriage which was not usually to be seen in countrymen. His hat was cocked, a rose dangled from his lips, he flourished his riding-whip right and

left, and he marched with a careless freedom, which proved that he, like other actors, felt himself for the moment to be the character he was called upon to assume.

This impudent exterior he maintained for at least a couple of miles, for the encouraging flattery of Barnabas was fresh in his mind, his spirits were invigorated by the exercise of walking and the pleasure of escaping from his master's society, and as yet he had not met a soul on the road. At Crown Point, however, the sudden apparition of a yeoman with a cudgel in his hand recalled him to the dangers of his position, and caused him to plunge precipitately into the woods, albeit the yeoman was unknown to him, and was good miles of wild country lay between him and Talbot Hall.

He took a widely circuitous route, and when he at length drew near the Hall, it was with the stealth of a fox and the timidity of a hare combined. It was only by thinking strenuously of his master's horse-pistols that he overcame the inclination to give up the perilous undertaking. Little by little he approached, and came within a hundred yards of the lodge gates. Peering through the brambles by the road-side he could see the gate, and the lodge with its bright mullioned windows and the white curtains tied with blue ribbon. He fancied he saw Jenny herself moving within the room. He heard the sound of wheels coming down the drive, and crouched closer, then the click of the gate latch, and bending forward, yet prepared to dash into the woods behind him if necessary, he saw Blake, the steward, in his light cart, come into the road and turn towards Sevenoaks. Slink recollected that it was market-day.

As the cart drove off, a young woman stepped into the road and looked after it. She was a shapely young woman of twenty or thereabouts, with dark hair and eyes, and a complexion as brown as a berry; had it been a few shades darker one would have thought her a gipsy, her eyes and teeth lacked nothing of the perfection of a gipsy's. She wore a white cap and a print dress short enough to escape her heels when she walked, and show the neat turn of her ankles; her sleeves were rolled up over her fine arms, which she stuck akimbo, resting her hands on her hips as she stood in the middle of the road, looking now to the left, now to the right.

"Jenny," murmured Slink, with a sigh. He was too far away to see the expression of her face. It seemed to him that he must be thinking of him—that perhaps she was sighing for him to return to her—that she would listen to his entreaty if he went humbly to her side and asked for forgiveness now.

Whom could she expect, whom could she be hoping to see in the road if not him?

She dropped her hands and took up the corner of her apron, looking pensively up the road, with her head a little inclined to one side.

"If she's going to cry that settles it," said Slink, taking his hat in his hand.

But Jenny carried the corner of her apron no higher than her white teeth, and while Slink was still hesitating, in doubt whether to take the action as a sign of sentiment or indifference, her thoughtful mood gave place to another, and she returned with a brisk step to the lodge, singing a snatch of a lively song.

"Singing!—a heartless baggage," said Slink. "And the very tune she knows I don't like. Well, if that's all she cares for me I won't ask her to forgive me. I'll just do as his honour bid me. She shall see that I can be as careless as she is. I am not the fool I was. I'll warrant she'll be less independent when she finds what sort of a man she has to deal with now. If she thinks I'm afraid she is mistaken. Master Blake won't be back for two hours, and no one calls at the lodge on market-day."

With these thoughts Slink cocked his hat carefully, fished out the rose which he had put in his pocket for safety, and having stuck it between his teeth, and assured himself that he had forgotten nothing of the part he was to play, he made a step towards the road, then he stopped, coughed, scratched his ear, and looked nervously towards the lodge.

Jenny had opened the window and was looking out. He determined to wait until she withdrew. He didn't wish her to see him come out of the wood, and he didn't wish to march up to the lodge under the fire of her eyes. He preferred coming upon her from behind, and taking her unprepared.

Jenny left the window to his regret; the respite had just given his spark of courage time to die out, and he found it more difficult than ever to leave the safe shelter of the wood. But once more he fixed his mind on Barnabas and his pistols, and with desperate resolution made a step forward and emerged from his cover. Now he was fairly in the road and facing the lodge, retreat was impossible. He dared not look at the window, it was as much as he could do to keep the stem of the rose between his teeth, his heart beat with suffocating force, his hands grew wet, and his knees shook under him as he advanced.

"Pistols, pistols, pistols," he murmured as he drew near the

lodge. He heard the clatter of plates, and above it the voice of Jenny singing the song he objected to. The sounds strengthened him, and came just at the right moment, for he was close by the gates, and he concluded that if he were lucky he might find her in the kitchen, where the clattering of plates and dishes showed she was engaged. He passed the gate, lifted the latch of the door, and entered the lodge at the moment Jenny was coming from the little adjoining kitchen.

Without a word or a moment's hesitation he marched up to her, and before she could recognise his features, for he took care to present that side of his face over which his hat was cocked, he had chucked her under the chin. Jenny's response was no less sudden and unexpected—with a swing of her right arm she fetched him such a slap on the face that the rose was shot out of his mouth, his hat flew to the other end of the room, and he with difficulty kept his feet, for the room appeared to spin round him, and a thousand windows danced before his eyes.

"Why, 'tis Toby!" exclaimed Jenny, clapping her hands in astonishment.

"Slink, if you please," he answered with dignity, as he smoothed his ruffled hair, and crossed the room to pick up his hat and his rose.

"Slink, if you choose," retorted Jenny with asperity, checking the laughter that had risen to her lips. "'Tis a proper name for a man who can sneak away with his master's horse, and without bidding good-bye to any one."

"No one seemed to care whether I said good-bye or not, or what became of me; and as for the horse, my master told me I had as much right to it as the coat on my back."

"A pretty master, indeed. Father said you had fallen into the hands of a rogue."

"He's not more to blame than you, Jenny. It was you that drove me away—that made me so wretched. I didn't know what I was doing, and I didn't care, and if anything happens to me my blood will be upon your head."

"Oh, Toby."

"Yes, it's true enough, and you know it. The guilt rests upon you. You're like the young woman in the printed ballad I gave you last Maidstone Fair, who led her sweetheart to rob and murder his uncle all for love, and if—if one day I'm hanged at Tyburn,"—he stopped to shudder—"you'll read your own name in my dying speech and confession, and——"

"Oh, don't, Toby," cried Jenny, struck with horror at the picture presented to her imagination.

"And that's not all," continued Slink, pursuing the advantage he saw he had gained; "I shall walk, I know I shall. You'll hear my chains rattle in the night, and see me passing along in my sheet, just like the ghost in Otford Churchyard."

Jenny covered her head with her apron, as if to shut out the horrible vision.

"I'm a desperate, reckless man. Ah, if you only knew all!"

"You're not a murderer, Toby, are you?"

"Not yet."

"Nor a—a—thief?"

"No; but I won't answer for what may happen. I'm going the road to ruin fast. I don't go to bed at eight o'clock now. I gamble—I play cards night after night for money. I can't sleep, and sometimes I sit up half the night drinking spirits and singing songs, and listening to stories that are not fit for girls. Look at me! I'm not what I was—a simple, innocent countryman. Look at me!"

Jenny removed her apron and looked at him timidly. His hat was again cocked, and the rose, somewhat the worse for rough usage, hung limp from the corner of his mouth. He stood with his legs astride, one hand on his hips, and a defiant expression on his face.

"No, you're not what you were," Jenny said, shaking her head gravely; and something in her tone suggested to Slink's mind that she was not displeased with the change in his appearance.

He paused a minute to consider how he was to pursue his victory, for a merely temporary victory is sometimes more fatal in its results than a repulse—then dropping his voice to a tender tone, he said:

"You haven't altered, Jenny; you're just as pretty as ever."

"You've seen finer ladies than I am, I daresay," said she, blushing.

"Oh, yes, hundreds—every day, but none that could make me forget you."

Jenny raised her eyes and smiled, making it difficult for Slink to keep up the line of attack which had gained him such an advantage. However, he overcame the temptation to be ingenuous and tender, and continued:

"No, you have not altered at all; you're pretty, but heartless."

"Oh, Toby! how can you say that?"

"Is it not the truth? Have you lost a single pound since I have been away? Look at your cheeks, and your arms as plump

and beautiful as if you'd never had a day's sorrow in your life. It was nothing to you that you had driven a faithful lover to ruin! If I had been dead it would have been all the same to you, you would have still kept plump and pretty."

"I can't help it, Toby. I didn't eat anything for a whole day after you went away, but the next morning my appetite was too strong for me. Still I have thought of you, I have."

"Have you, Jenny?"

"Yes, nights and days, I have; and I've said prayers for you."

"Real true, Jenny?"

"Yes, real true. I went out in the road this very afternoon, and thought to myself as I looked up the road, 'Oh, if I could only see Toby coming along!'"

"But you were singing a song when I came in."

"I was obliged to, to prevent myself crying."

"But it was 'Jack Robinson,' Jenny, and you know I never liked to hear you sing that."

"How could I know what I was singing, when I was thinking all the time of you?" Jenny put her apron to her eyes, and whimpering, continued: "'Tis you that are cruel and forgetful, or you would have come back to see whether I was in distress; and if you loved me truly, for my sake you wouldn't have done wrong, and gone seeing fine ladies, and gambling, and drinking, and singing songs that you wouldn't like me to hear. And you might have known that I laughed at you only to tease you; a girl doesn't tease anyone that she dislikes. And then you were such a simple fellow, one was forced to laugh at you sometimes—not as you are now, with your smart gloves, and your hair cut like a gentleman's. No, don't take my hand, you're a wicked man now. I daresay you thought, when you came in with your impudent manner and touched me under the chin, that you could take liberties with me now you're a fine gentleman and I'm only a poor girl; but you've made a mistake. I will always be a good girl, and you may go away and leave me, to die all alone and unhappy, and never sing or laugh again, and oh! oh! oh!——"

The sentence was finished in broken sobs and exclamations.

"Don't cry, Jenny dear; don't see, there's a sweet girl. I'm not so very wicked."

"Oh, yes you are. You've been listening to fine ladies and forgetting me."

"Forgetting you, Jenny! Think of the risk I run in coming to you now. If your father caught me I should be hanged for that mistake about the horse."

"No, no, you wouldn't. Father said he should let you off with a thrashing, for he knew you had done wrong only because you were so silly as not to know better. But it's fortunate you didn't come half-an-hour ago."

"Fortunate for your father, Jenny. I can defend myself, I'm not afraid. Not that I should like to injure a hair of his head, for he is your father. Oh, let him come, I'm not afraid."

"He won't return for two hours, he's gone to market."

"I know that—that is—but why should we talk of him? it is you that I have come to see."

"Did you come on purpose?"

"Yes. I came to bring you this token. It should have been better, but I am poor; for I am not lucky at cards."

"Oh, what a sweet brooch! and earrings too, to match, how lovely! Coral hearts and silver arrows, how beautiful! But—but—I think I mustn't take them."

"Why not, Jenny?"

"I wouldn't like to wear them if they weren't—weren't honestly come by."

"Oh, they were bought and paid for honestly, I swear."

"But if you won the money at gambling, or if the money was given you by—the fine ladies——"

Slink paused a minute, and then looking at Jenny, with the tears standing in his eyes, he held out his hand and said:

"Give 'em me back, Jenny. You shan't wear 'em, dear, for the money that bought 'em was given me by my master for the purpose, and the gift's none of my own, and unworthy for you to wear. I won't deceive you, Jenny; I'll win you by fair means or not at all." He threw the trinkets on the ground, and crushed them under his feet in a fury. "I will tell you the whole truth, and why I'm here, and all that I have done and suffered through my own first folly. I will conceal nothing. You——"

At this moment Jenny's hand was clapped upon his mouth, and she whispered hurriedly,

"Here is Mr. Talbot. Not a word, or you are lost. Quick! into the kitchen, quick!"

As may be imagined, Slink did not require pressing; he shot into the kitchen like a mouse before a cat.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ESCAPE.

"GIVE me a mug of ale, Jenny," said Tom Talbot, entering the lodge. "I am too idle to go up to the house, or the path is too long, one or the other. Ah, child, what is the matter with you? Your lips are almost white, and—surely you have been weeping?"

"No, Sir, nothing ails me. Maybe the mid-day heat tries me. I will get you the ale at once, Sir."

Jenny placed a chair for Tom Talbot quickly, and hurried into the kitchen, closing the door behind her.

"Jenny, love," whispered Slink, "if it will save you from getting into trouble I will give myself up to the young master at once, though I hang for it."

Jenny shook her head, and gave him her hand while she stooped to draw the ale. He pressed it to his lips and turned his eyes to the door alternately.

"Say the word, and for your sake I'll be brave," he whispered, as she rose from the ground.

She answered by a shake of the head, and with a smile of encouragement and a squeeze of the hand she left him. It was only womanly on her part to face a danger with gladness for a man in peril.

When she re-entered the room she found Tom Talbot seated, with a much crushed rose in one hand and the fragments of a brooch in the other, which he was looking at with curiosity.

"What does this mean, Jenny?" he asked; "here are the ruins of trinkets which could not have been so desperately crushed by accident."

Jenny set the mug on the table beside Tom, and said—

"No, Sir; 'twas not an accident."

"Weren't they pretty enough for you, Jenny?"

"Oh! they were lovely; coral hearts with arrows through them—so sweet." Jenny turned to the chimney, to dust the ornaments upon it, while Tom, looking at the fragments, said to himself:

"Even here one loves and suffers. Is there no corner in the world where one may live heart-whole and in peace?" The girl kept her back to him.

"Jenny, you who are so fond of ornaments—must have had a strong reason to make you break this offering—for they were an offering, I suppose?"

"They were a token from my sweetheart, that is——" she paused.

"That is—from him who was your sweetheart. Your father has told me about that early love. They were a present from Toby Slink, I suppose?"

"Yes," sighed Jenny.

"You did right to crush them. You are worth a good husband, one a thousand times better than that sneaking thief. Crush the thoughts of him as you have crushed his gift, and open your heart to one of the decent lads in the town."

"Toby was not so bad as you think, Sir. I treated him most ill, that's why he ran away."

"And that is why he stole a horse at the same time, hey? Don't deceive yourself, Jenny, and above all, don't let him deceive you. If I catch him hanging about here he shall repent his rashness."

"You wouldn't have him hanged, would you, Sir?"

"No, perhaps not. The penalty of the law is greater than the offence; but I would certainly whip him within an inch of his life. I suppose he sent you these trifles by a friend?"

"He brought them himself."

"Hum! He has more courage than I should give such a fellow credit for. But perhaps he watched your father out of sight, and did not know that I was about. When was he here?"

"A—a—a—he was here a quarter of an hour ago."

"Only a quarter of an hour?" Tom cried, starting up.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Talbot, you won't hurt him?"

"Jenny, my child, 'tis but too clear that you still care for this rascal, despite your better judgment. He has come once, he will come again, unless he has such a lesson as will stay in his memory. Your anxiety tells me that you still like him, and if I can see that, will not he? and seeing your weakness, will he not take advantage of it to your life-long misery? I promise you I will not give him up to justice, but——"

"Mr. Talbot! Mr. Talbot! what are you going to do?"

"I am going up to the house for my band and a whip, Jenny."

As Tom strode off to the Hall, Jenny opened the door and cried to Slink:

"Quick! quick, Toby, out of the open window here. He cannot see you from the drive."

"I'll go outside, Jenny, and wait for him. I will take my whipping without crying out, if I can, and show him that I'm not such a sneaking rascal as he takes me to be. I'd have

come out while he was here, but for fear of putting you to the blush, dear. Let him beat me."

"No, no. Toby, if you do really love me, save yourself. The woods are open, and you have a start. You can't love me, Toby, or you wouldn't linger."

"You don't believe all he has said against me?"

"No; should I love you if I did?"

"And you won't open your heart to no decent lad as he was recommending?"

"No. Don't stay! Listen, Toby; *I won't marry a man who's been thrashed!* now will you save yourself?"

"Give us a kiss, Jenny, to show we're right down earnest and true."

She threw her arms round his neck and gave him a hearty kiss, lip to lip, and the next moment, invigorated and with a strength born of his new manhood, Slink scrambled through the window and dashed off into the woods. He had not a moment to spare, already he heard the hound welcoming his master's approach to the stable.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN AFTERNOON'S WORK.

THE time hung heavily on Barnabas Crewe in Slink's absence. Strolling into the meadow behind the inn in search of amusement, he found there only a sleepy cat stretched in the sun, and a cow chewing the cud under a hedge. He threw the cat in the horse-pond, and stoned the cow until he heard someone approaching, when he turned into the skittle-alley where three or four louts were playing. He sat down and watched the game in the hopes of finding some method of cheating, which would justify him in joining the players and compensate for his want of skill; failing to succeed in his endeavour, he left the alley in disgust, and seated himself with a pot and a pipe in the tap-room.

There he drank, smoked, and dosed by turns, until he felt hungry enough to eat some bread and cheese. After that he dosed again, until the flies irritated him into activity; then he went into the meadow to see if he could find the cat, or anything else that might afford him diversion. But the cat was now basking on the roof of a barn, and blinked at him with exasperating indifference, and the cow was browsing in a part

of the field where she could not be stoned without the risk of observation, so with a curse he lounged into the stable where he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking at the horses for a time.

Why should not he go up the road with the chance of meeting Slink? He called the stable lad and ordered him to saddle the grey mare, which he had exchanged at Gravesend for the horse taken by Slink, and while his bidding was being done he fetched his pistols from the house and put them in their holsters. Then he mounted, and walked his horse up the hill that overlooks the weald, keeping his eyes on the wood before him.

He was close to Crown Point, when Slink burst through the scrub by the woodside, and came running up to him breathless.

"Run, your honour, run," he gasped. "He's at my heels—he's after me."

"He—who?"

"Master Tummus."

"Talbot?"

"Yes, run, for heaven's sake, master, run."

"Don't be a fool, tell me what has happened. I shan't stir till you do."

"I was along with Jenny when he passed the window. I hid in the kitchen, and while I was there he came into t'other room, and obliged Jenny to tell him I had been there, and as he went up to the Hall to find a whip and his hound, I escaped by the window. He's following me now with the hound."

Barnabas smacked his hip with his whip and grinned.

"Shall I go on, master?" asked Slink.

"No. What do you fear?"

"The hound, your honour—and Master Tom."

"Afraid of a dog! What's the handle of your whip for; if Mr. Talbot tries to hit you, can't you defend yourself?"

"No, your honour. I'll do him no harm, nor his dog neither. I've made up my mind—if he catches me I'll make a clean breast of it, and let him hang me or do what he will after."

"The deuce you will. Do you know that you might get me into trouble?"

"Can't help that, master. You'd best let me get off while I can."

"Wait—the hound will follow you to Ightham. That won't do. We shall have a dozen constables at our heels before night. Do you mean what you said just now?"

"I do, and nothing else. Ah, you may do your worst with

them," he alluded to the pistols which Barnabas tapped significantly, "I'm reg'lar desperate."

"What do you mean? I'm trying my best to save you. Is there another inn nearer than Ightham?"

"Yes—at the foot of the hill—the 'Sir Jeffrey Amhurst.'"

"Then we must go back on our footsteps."

"But that's straight towards danger—towards Master Tom and his dog."

"So much the better. Go on in front, and when you catch sight of the inn stop. If you don't go I'll stop your tongue for ever."

Choosing the lesser evil, Slink turned and quickly ran up the hill, which, despite the opposition of Barnabas, he had been descending as he recounted what had happened, reached the cross-roads, and ran down the road towards Sevenoaks, until he came to a bend, whence he could see the 'Sir Jeffrey.'

Barnabas, who had followed close on his heels, with his eye on the alert and his right hand in the opened holster, pulled up and dismounted.

"Jump up," he cried, taking the pistol from its holster and slipping it into his capacious pocket. "You don't want twice telling for that. Now then, off you go to the inn at Ightham, and wait there for me. You're safe. The scent's broken."

Without a moment's hesitation, Slink, who had sprung into the saddle, dug his heels into the grey mare's sides, and using his whip without stint, galloped off in the direction of Ightham.

Barnabas walked down to the "Sir Jeffrey" and waited.

Half an hour later, Tom, following his hound, emerged from the wood at Crown Point.

With his muzzle to the ground, the hound ran down the hill towards Ightham for a hundred yards, then stopped, diverged to the right, to the left, ran on for half a dozen yards, and returned whining to the spot from which he had diverged.

"Good dog, good Dido—follow up," said Tom, patting her encouragingly.

Dido licked his hand, cried, and with her muzzle down again ran off to the left, pushing through the unbroken brake.

Tom waited in the road; presently Dido came from the wood higher up, took up the old scent with a bark of satisfaction, and ran down to where Tom stood, then finding herself again at fault, she ran down the bank to the right, and after some minutes returned, and looking up, whimpered as if for assistance.

"He has feared to go on to the village, and doubled," said

Tom, as he retraced his steps towards the crest of the hill. Dido was again upon the scent, but instead of following it into the wood from which they had come, she ran along the road and descended the hill towards Sevenoaks, but within sight of the "Sir Jeffrey Amhurst" she came to a stand, and appeared again at fault. This puzzled Tom.

"He must have heard the dog and doubled to delay pursuit," thought he, after some reflection. "A convincing proof that he's no simpleton. 'Tis not unlikely that he got back in the wood, and was perched upon one of the trees we passed under. He shan't have the gratification of seeing us go back, we will return by the road. Come, Dido," he called to the hound, who was still searching for the lost scent, "come; he has given us an afternoon's amusement, and we will let him rest, and rest ourselves for a time."

He followed the road to the "Sir Jeffrey," and sitting on the settle in the porch, called for ale.

"Have you seen a young countryman pass here this afternoon?" he asked of the woman who served him.

"No, muzzer, nobody's been nigh this afternoon save a gent, and he ain't a countryman for certain; he's in the tap now."

To satisfy himself that the "gent" was not Slink disguised, Tom walked into the tap-room, where he looked at Barnabas, who was feeding Dido with scraps from the bread and cheese before him.

"Not much of the gent, and still less of the countryman in his composition," said Tom to himself.

"Looking for a young countryman?" asked Barnabas.

"Yes—have you seen anyone looking as though he were pursued?"

"No. That's just what I'm looking for myself. I've a warrant in my pocket for a young fellow named Slink."

"The very man I'm after. He was my servant—my name is Talbot."

This is exactly what Barnabas wished to be certain about. He looked carefully at Tom, and then with a grunt said:

"You'll be lucky if you catch him. He's a downy one, is Toby Slink."

Tom nodded and withdrew, whistling to his hound. But Dido found the bread and cheese seductive and lingered by Barnabas, whose appearance was less repulsive to her than to Tom.

Tom rested awhile, then he paid for his ale and left the "Sir Jeffrey." The sun was declining, and the great oaks threw an agreeable shade over the margin of turf by the roadside; the

time and place induced meditation, and Tom walked onwards at a leisurely pace, with his hands crossed behind him, thinking no more of Slink, but, as may be imagined, of Lady Betty.

"After all," he thought, "why should she not laugh and be gay. If she valued my life at all she would be pleased to hear that I had escaped from the duel. That she would learn from Gerard, who I warrant was not too modest to furnish all particulars. Perhaps those particulars excited her mirth. For a truth, I cut a mighty ridiculous figure, digging and plunging at an adversary who contented himself with parrying my thrusts, and who was too magnanimous to take advantage of my inferiority. 'Tis human weakness that serves as the food for mirth. The world sympathises with the fortunate, and laughs at the unlucky, from Quixote to the puppets in a Punch show, and the more the poor fools are beat the more the crowd laughs. One may laugh and not be heartless, those who are readiest to smile are readiest to weep. Had I fallen, Lady Betty would have shed a tear for me: I did not fall, and so she laughed. Why should I wish it otherwise? Would I have her wretched rather than merry? It seems so, for I have done more to torment her in the last six months than to make her happy. Could I ever have made her happy? It seems to me as I walk here in the sweet fresh air, with Nature's unblemished handiwork on every side, that nothing is wanting to perfect my happiness, but one truly loving soul to share in these delights. She might feel as I do. But the summer goes, and we could not live for ever in seclusion. Perhaps for one day of happiness there might be a hundred of misery. What is worse than to be doubted? Nothing—unless it be—to doubt."

Dido came bustling through the brushwood to his side, and jumped up at his side as if in apology for her absence. Tom mechanically dropped his hand and caressed her, and while Dido, satisfied that her inconstancy was not resented, ran off again into the wood from which she had come, he replaced his hands behind him and continued his reflection.

"It is odd that a man, with every inducement to succeed, cannot contrive to subdue his rebellious nature. But for my jealousy I might win the girl I love; but a fool loving her with not a tithe of my affection, stands a better chance than I do. Will time alter my temper? and will she be free to woo when I may woo her well?"

His thoughts were still in this dreary train, when they were suddenly arrested by a howl from the wood on his right hand. The howl was loud and long; it was repeated again and again. Tom glanced rapidly to the right and left; Dido was not in

sight. He leapt across the ditch, and pushed his way through the brambles and short growth into the wood, and towards the spot whence the hound's cries proceeded, now short and feeble.

Beyond the oaks was a belt of pines free from under-growth, and it was here that Tom found his hound stretched upon the dry fir-spines. His first impression had been that Dido had set her foot in a trap laid for vermin, but a glance showed him that a more serious mischief had befallen her.

"Dido! What is it? poor old girl!" he cried, dropping upon his knees by her side.

At the sound of his voice the poor brute tried to get upon her feet, and fell back with a whine. Tom had a warm affection for dogs, for this one especially. Dido had recognised him on his coming to the Hall, though she had not seen him for eighteen months. He passed his hand rapidly over her body and legs without finding any trace of a wound: a drop of blood-stained saliva in the corner of her mouth was the only proof of injury as she lay. He essayed gently to raise her head; she gave a sharp cry, and then, as he tenderly lowered her head again upon the ground, she licked his hand in forgiveness of the pain he had caused her.

"Poor loving, faithful bitch!" he murmured.

She wagged her tail feebly in response, and whined as if complaining that she could do no more. He put his hand down to her muzzle; she gave it a lick, opened her glassy eyes to look again upon her master, and then with a deep gasp closed them for ever.

If love and fidelity qualifies a soul for immortality, it was but her unworthy body that ceased to live: but the earthly link which had bound her to Tom was broken, and when lifting her head he discovered the under side all crushed and splintered by a murdering blow, he cried:

"My God! this is too harsh! Why am I robbed of this poor friend?" And then, as he looked around him in a sudden access of passion. "Who is the coward that has done this thing?"

As if in reply there came from the thickets behind him the report of a firearm, and a shot sung past his ear.

To revenge Dido Tom sprang to his feet and dashed into the thickets, over which the smoke yet hung in blue strata. He plunged forward, tearing his way through the impeding growth until he reached the road. Not a creature was in sight, not a sound reached his ears, for the rascal who succeeded in killing Dido and failed to murder Tom, had slipped into the pine wood, and was escaping rapidly over its free and noiseless carpet.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BLAKE AND TOM'S CONCLUSIONS.

AFTER half-an-hour's fruitless search, Tom gave up the pursuit, and in dull dejection made his way to Talbot Hall. An hour before he had scarcely noticed Dido's caress, now, feeling her loss at every step, he wondered how he could have valued her so slightly.

"It is by loss that we learn to prize the trifles that contribute to our happiness, and not alone the trifles," he said to himself. He was beginning to profit by the lesson.

He found the steward in the lodge with his daughter.

"Come with me," said Tom; "I want the light cart at once."

A short time afterwards Jenny heard the cart coming down the drive, and opening the gate, looked up with anxiety at Tom, who sat by her father's side; but she could learn nothing from the expression of his face.

"Anything happened unpleasant, Sir?" asked Blake, breaking the silence when they were fairly on the road.

"My hound, Dido, has been killed."

"Killed, sir?"

Tom nodded; he was in no humour for talking.

"Who killed her, Sir? if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"Slink," Tom answered.

The steward echoed the name, looking at his master incredulously; but Tom had turned his face aside, and Blake saw that it would be unwise to question him further at present.

Tom, by a sign, bade the steward pull up when they came to that part of the road where he had been arrested by Dido's cry, and led the way through the wood to the fir plantation.

"Poor bitch!" he said, looking down upon the lifeless hound who could never again greet him with joyful yelps, or answer to his call; and then as Blake came up he turned away, his eyes filling with tears.

The steward had less feeling for dogs, and proceeded to examine the wound.

"Dear heart o' me! here's been a blow to be sure! She was a good hound too."

Tom walked slowly away to escape the commentary. Presently Blake came to his side, as he was leaning against the trunk of a fir, and said:

"You'll excuse me, Sir, but did you see Slink kill the hound?"

"No."

"May I make so bold as to ask why you think he did it?"

"I have been chasing him with the hound; a good reason for supposing that he killed her."

"Take my word for it, Sir, 'tisin't none of his work. He couldn't do it."

"Why not? The same hand that took the hound's life tried to take mine."

"And you didn't see him?"

"No; he shot at me from the bush there. What does it matter who did it, the bitch is dead?"

"With all due respect, Sir, it matters a great deal. The man who fired at you is a murderer at heart, and God forbid we should lay a crime, even in our own minds, against any man without due cause. 'Tis not to be thought on carelessly, and the sin should be proved against the wicked in justice to the innocent."

"You're in the right, Blake. Tell me why you think Slink guileless."

"He loved that hound, Sir, as much as you did. She slept upon his feet o' nights, and if she followed his scent this afternoon, as my Jenny tells me you took him for to do, 'twas as much love as instinct that made her trace his footsteps. There's a hunch of bread under the dog's side, she must have been eating the gift from his hand when he struck the blow, and do you think anyone with a heart inside him could do such a wicked, cruel thing as that? If you knew the lad, you couldn't think him capable of such a deed, a poor, harmless critter, that couldn't abear to see a pig killed; and as for using guns, why, dear heart o' me! he would jump up like a crow if he heard one fired half a mile off. My Jenny's told me all what happened after I'd gone to market. He's got into bad hands, but his heart is decent and clean still. He was hid in the kitchen while you were in the parlour, and when you'd gone to fetch the hound he wanted to give himself up, take the thrashing you had promised him, and ask pardon afterwards like a man. But my girl, who can't get over her fondness for the lad, despite his weak head, and who's got a kind of wholesome Kentish pride in her, said she'd never marry a man who'd been thrashed, and so the lad took to his heels. Now, Sir, I put it to you, with all due respect, do you think a lad of that kidney could kill your hound and shoot at you?"

"I shall be heartily glad to find myself mistaken."

"What motive could he have, when he wants to be forgiven and get a-courting of Jenny agin? No, master, 'tain't Slink, with all humbleness be it said."

"Then who can it be? I have no enemy, at least, none who would descend to such an act."

"It's just likely to be nothing else but a poacher, dogs is their nat'ral enemies; his gun might have gone off as he was crawling through the bushes to escape."

"I heard the shot whistle past my ear the moment before the report."

"Then we can settle whether it was a murderer or a poacher. Where did the shot come from?"

"That thicket. I was kneeling by the dog."

"If it was a poacher he used small shot, and we shall find some in the firs," said the steward, crossing to the trees beyond where the dog lay. He examined two trees without making any discovery, at the third he pointed to the cut bark, and turning his head to Tom, said, with a melancholy shake of his head, "'Tain't no poacher, master, 'tis a slug made that cut."

"And what do you conclude from that?"

"That you've got a wus enemy than poor Slink."

"He won't be content with one trial and failure, then. Let us get back to the Hall, Blake; I'm sick of the business. As for Slink, I am willing to accept your view of him. Can you take the dog without my help?"

"Yes, Master Talbot."

The steward walked towards the dead hound with his eyes on the ground, and in deep perplexity. He was vain of his own perspicacity, and besides that, his master's life and interests were dear to him. He stooped down and picked up something from the brown spine-covered earth.

"The villain tempted the hound with all manner," said he, turning to Tom, who was walking apart; "here's a bit o' cheese."

Tom stopped, suddenly remembering the man he had seen at the "Sir Jeffrey" feeding Dido with scraps from the bread and cheese before him.

"What is it, Sir? Have you got ever a clue?"

Tom explained to Blake what was in his thoughts.

"If you've no objections, Sir, we will run up to the 'Sir Jeffrey,' the woman will know her own cheese again, and be able to tell us what became of the man."

Tom agreed to the proposal, and when Blake had laid the dog in the cart, they drove to the "Sir Jeffrey Amhurst" and made inquiries. The hostess proved to Tom that the cheese was identical with that she had served to Barnabas, and said that he had left a few minutes after Tom, apparently in haste,

which seemed to her peculiar, inasmuch as he had idled in the tap-room for so long a time beforehand. Another peculiarity had been observed by her, the man had come to the house on foot but with a spur on his heel.

"Thank God! that clears Slink," said the steward.

When they were again in the cart Tom sat in sombre reflection for some time, then he said:

"The odd thing is that Dido lost the lad's scent close to that inn."

"He did! Then that carries us on still further, Sir. The man with the spur on his heel might have given his horse to Slink. That would break the scent at once. You may depend upon it, Sir, that he's the scoundrel who got that poor foolish lad under his thumb. And then again, look here, Master Tummas, he might have reckoned that if he succeeded in killing you, the murder would be charged against Toby, when it was found that you had gone in pursuit of him with the hound."

"The inference is logical enough," said Tom, after a few moments of thought. "But what on earth could be his motive? I never saw the man before in my life—to my knowledge."

To this question Blake could only reply by suggestions—and none of them seemed to Tom a satisfactory explanation of the mystery.

"One thing is certain, the lad Toby is innocent, isn't he, Master Tummas?" asked Blake, glowing with pride over what he considered his own particular achievement.

"Yes. I am convinced of that—thanks to your sagacity."

"Thank you, Sir, for the compliment. One must have his wits about him to manage an estate as I've managed Talbot Hall for fifteen years, and never had a single complaint from the Admiral or Doctor Blandly. Hows'mever, that's vanity. Now we know it isn't Slink as shot at you and killed the hound, and we are justified in supposing that it's the man he calls his master. So much we've got at already—it ain't much, but it's summat."

"And there let it end," said Tom, heartily tired of the subject.

"Let it end!" echoed the steward aghast at the prospect of relinquishing an inquiry that had already reflected so much credit upon his intelligence, and which he anticipated would in the end raise him to the rank of a Machiavel in the society of the village ale-house. "You'll have the constables out, and the beaters sure-ly!"

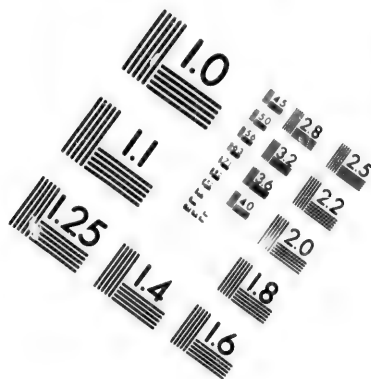
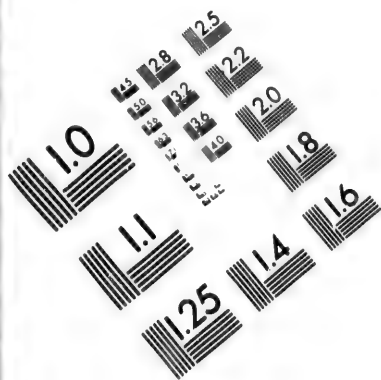
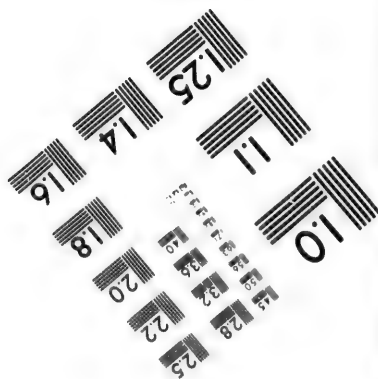
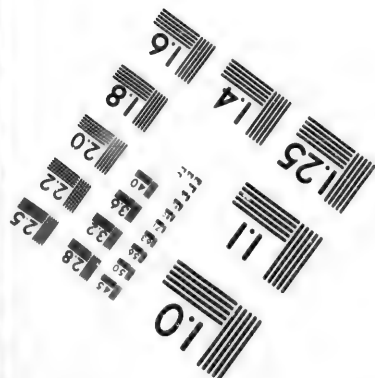
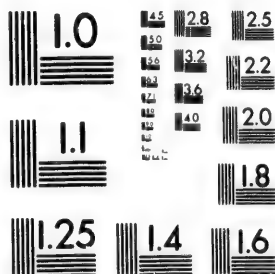


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)



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10

"They can't restore the life of my poor bitch."

"But the man who killed her is at large—a villain."

"And is likely to be, for all the constables in Kent wouldn't catch him now. The most likely supposition that we can come to is that his only motive in shooting at me was to get my watch and a few guineas. Having failed he would decamp quickly enough, and is now doubtless out of this shire and half over the next."

"Lord love you, Sir, there's a hundred holes and corners where a thief might hide, but Master Fergusson the constable know 'em every one."

"A good reason for the thieves to avoid such holes and corners."

"With all duty to you, Sir, I can't think it's right to let such a man get off scot free."

"He wouldn't if I could have caught him. No good can come of pushing the inquiry further. If the man was caught there is no witness to prove he shot at me, the suspicion would rest upon Slink, and I might be called upon to prosecute him when it comes to light that he had taken my horse. We cannot wish that; for if he be the simpleton you describe, he deserves to be pitied rather than punished. I freely forgive him for his love of the hound. Make Jenny's mind easy on that score, but say nothing about what has happened. Tell no one. Let it be a secret between us. I wish to avoid publicity. Now we will end the discussion, the subject to say the least of it is unpleasant, and the best thing we can do is to forget it as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A LOVE LETTER.

THE steward obeyed his master and kept the events of the afternoon a secret from his admirers at the ale-house, because it was his duty; but he felt it not less his duty to follow up the clue secretly in order to protect his master from further outrages, however he might neglect his own safety. And so far from being of Tom's opinion that the best thing to be done was to forget what had happened, he made it the central theme of his cogitations.

He was compelled by his own vanity to disagree with the construction Tom had put upon the murderer's motive. "Gents has nothing to do but to get into mischief through jealousy

and such like, and why should Master Tummy, being a gent, not do likewise," he reasoned.

Tom's unexpected arrival at the Hall, his gloom and taciturnity strengthened the idea that he was involved in some tragic complications, and after a few days Blake looked upon it as a certain fact that the unknown assailant was a ruffian hired to do him injury. Supposing this to be the case, he concluded that the ruffian would not leave the county, but wait in concealment until he found another opportunity of attempting his purpose.

Without stating his object, he made inquiries in the surrounding hamlets, but the utmost he could learn was that a horseman and his servant had arrived at the 'George' inn, at Ightham, on the morning of the same day on which the attack was made, and left it the same evening, taking the Wrotham Road. He was not discouraged by this result; the more he thought of the matter, the more satisfied he felt that his own conclusions were accurate, and the prospect of an ultimate triumph—of achieving alone that which his master had declared all the constables in Kent would fail to do—was an incentive to fresh endeavours. Every day he extended the radius of his inquiries.

His peregrination took him away from the Hall for a considerable portion of the day. He was not wanted there. The business of the estate was in such admirable working order that it called for no attention. Tom made no inquiries, indeed he seemed to avoid conversation and to seek solitude. And Jenny was secretly rejoiced when her father said he was going out and would probably not return until late.

Jenny had an idea that before long she should see Slink again, and the idea arose from no line of subtle reasoning, but from direct womanly intuition. During her father's absence she spent the best part of her time at the little window, or in the road looking to the right and to the left in expectation. One afternoon, as she was standing thus, a piece of twig fell at her feet. She started in astonishment, for not a soul was to be seen up or down the road, then she heard the call of a blackbird, and knew that Toby must be in the wood facing the gates—for he could equal any bird at whistling. After a glance to assure herself that Mr. Talbot was not in sight, she approached the brambles on the opposite side of the road with a careless step and her eyes alert.

"Here, sweetheart—here I be," whispered Slink.

She nodded and seated herself on the bank beside the bramble through which she could see Slink's head and shoulders.

"Mr. Tom's in the park somewhere," whispered Jenny.

"I know it, love, and your father's hunting after me at Otford—but I'm right glad to risk my life for a chance of seeing your sweet face."

Jenny looked towards the bush, and her eyes half closed smiled in harmony with her lips. It was so delightful to have a lover who would risk his life for her, that she could not bring herself to tell him that Mr. Talbot had forgiven him.

"I'm not the coward I was, Jenny." Jenny shook her head in acquiescence. "I do think it's knowing that you love me gives me courage, dear."

"How do you know I love you?" Jenny asked in a whisper, bending her head over her knees.

"'Cause I don't doubt it no longer." Jenny nodded at this conclusive argument. "An' if you said you didn't I'd up and say you wur a ——" Toby paused, even passion would not justify him in using the appropriate word.

"What would you say I was?"

"I wouldn't say nothin, but I'd up and give you a great buss on the lips, so as you shouldn't say it no more."

"And supposing I wouldn't let you kiss me?"

"Then I'd kiss you more than ever."

His audacity seemed not displeasing to Jenny, and remembering what Barnabas had said, he continued:

"Snivelling and sneaking won't win a girl's heart if she's any spirit. A man must be bold and venturesome, and laugh at her fine airs."

"Where did you learn that?" asked Jenny suspiciously.

"Hum! When a man goes out in the world he must learn."

"You've been courting fine ladies in London, Toby."

"Do you think I've got two hearts, Jenny? And if I had, do you think I could love one of them ladies, all mucked up wi' paint and powder, and dressed up like a Pope, after seeing of you with your fine brown arms, and your red face, and your dress all sweet and pure from the wash-tub? No, Jenny, I never wars such a fool as that'd come to."

Jenny gave a sigh of satisfaction, and smiled encouragement upon her lover, whose words were as good as poetry to her ear, and better perhaps, being intelligible, and coming straight from his honest heart.

"And you, dear," continued he, "you han't took Master Tummus's advice; you han't looked about for no decent lad?"

"No, Toby, I won't have ne'er a sweetheart but you."

He took no notice of the distinction, but oblivious of danger

started up to his feet, came to her side, and throwing his arm around her neck, gave her a hearty kiss.

"Don't, Toby dear, don't. Look, there's master walking in the drive."

"What's the odds? I don't care a button," cried Slink, boldly. "Don't you fear, Jenny—he shan't thrash me, nor no other man now."

"But I shall get into trouble."

Jenny rose from her seat.

"Don't ye go, sweetheart. See I'm safe behind the briars again. Stay awhile, pretend to be plucking a posy. I've a plenty to say to you yet awhile. I didn't look to see you. I daredn't hope to speak wi' you, so I wrote you a letter—leastways I got a party to write it for me."

"'Tis all the same, and have you put it in the post?"

"No; I feared it would go wrong, so I brought it wi' me to throw to you when I see the chance. But I can tell you all I had put on the paper."

"Give me the letter all the same, dear," murmured Jenny, with an insinuating smile. A letter was a tender form of communication that she had never yet received, and did not wish to lose.

"Pluck at the hare-bell against the bush, sweetheart."

Jenny extended her hand towards the flower, and Slink catching it conveyed it to his lips.

"Quick, quick. I hear a cart coming, 'tis father belike."

"Aye, I know the trot of the old pony. There, take the letter, love, and fare thee well. I shall come for the answer to-night."

He put a packet in her hand, which he held while he bent forward and kissed her arm. Then he withdrew with commendable speed into the wood.

Jenny waited a few moments in anxiety until her sweetheart disappeared before leaving the bank. When she turned she found that Mr. Talbot was not more than a dozen yards from the gate; that compelled her to be cautious. It was before the time of pocket-holes, and to get at her pocket it was necessary to raise the skirt of her dress, which could not be done without risking Mr. Talbot's observation. She slipped her hands under her apron, concealing the letter, and stood with her head on one side as if trying to catch a glimpse of the approaching cart. As the steward came up to the lodge, Mr. Talbot turned his back on the gate and walked away over the lawn.

"I'm going to the farrier's, my gal," said Blake, as the cart stopped. "Here be the butcher's meat for cook—take it."

Jenny lifted her right hand, keeping the other with the letter under her apron.

"Both hands, gal, or you'll drop it, like as not."

"No, I shan't, father."

"Do as I bid ye, and don't be so lazy."

Jenny grew scarlet to the loose curls on her brow, dropped her head, and still kept her left hand covered.

"What's a matter wi' ye, cut your finger, lass?"

Jenny, driven to desperation, nodded.

"Hei! hei! there's nought to be ashamed of in that, show 'um to me?"

Jenny did not move, except to cover her face with her right hand. Blake tied the reins to the side iron of the cart and descended quickly. Another mystery called for the exercise of his perspicacity. Jenny remained immovable, while her father lifted her apron and took the letter from her hand.

"Highly tighty! what have we got here? A letter like one of the gentlefolks', and spotted from end to side wi' kisses in red wax. 'Jenny Blake' writ in a hand as good as I could write it. My gal, you haven't been making acquaintance with any of these gentlemen rakes, I hope."

"No!" exclaimed Jenny, scornfully. "'Tisn't no gentleman; 'tis only—only—Toby."

"Toby! I knowed it! I knowed it well! He gave you it wi' his own hand, didn't he?"

Jenny nodded.

"Don't be ashamed, Jenny, I ain't a bit wroth wi' you. If he's the decent lad I believe him to be, I won't come between you no more than a father should. Where's Master Talbot?"

"There, across the lawn."

"Then we'll go inside and read the letter; pony won't budge. Come on, my gal."

Her father's unexpected good-humour restored Jenny's courage, and she followed him into the lodge with alacrity, no less eager than he to know the contents of the packet.

Blake opened the cover and displayed a pink neckerchief and a folded paper.

"Here, Jenny, take the favour; and now let us see what he says."

"'Dearest sweetheart,'" he read.

"'This comes hoping to find you as it leaves me at present, thanks be to God' (very pretty, to be sure), 'barring I can't sleep of nights for thinking how wretched I am all day parted from you, and living with a master who, speaking respectfully, as in duty bound, is no better than he should be. which often

and often I have wished myself dead and in my grave.' (I could have sworn it was so. It's a very good letter," Jenny sobbed and wiped away a tear with her apron). "Wished I was dead.—'Dear Jenny, I send you a token which you don't need to be ashamed to wear, as I am not to give. It was bought with my own money honestly, mending the pig-sty for Mrs. Smith, the sexton's wife, who is writing this letter for me now.'

"Smith the sexton, I don't know him."

"Isn't it a lovely letter, father?"

"No, my gal, he ought to have put in where he is stopping, and told us more about his master; however, we may come to that presently."

"Dear Jenny, if you only knew how glad I was to mend the pig-sty and earn money to buy you a token, though I don't know whether you will think it is good enough to wear, although if you love me as I love you, with all my heart, and I ever shall until my dying day. Dear Jenny, I can't tell you all I want to tell you, but if you will only meet me for two minutes, when your father and Mr. Talbot are away, I shall be able to tell you all. Dear Jenny, if you love me true, write me a letter and put it aside of the gate-post at night, and I will fetch it away when master is asleep, but if I am too bad for you to think of, tear up the token and put it in place of the letter. Dear Jenny, I shall love you and think of you always, and so no more at present from your humble and true sweetheart,

"T. SLINK."

Having finished the letter, Blake sat down and stroked his chin in thoughtful silence, while Jenny, taking her treasures into the adjoining kitchen, shut the door and had a good cry. Before the plenteous fountain of her emotions was exhausted, her father called her.

"Jenny, my gal," said he, when she opened the door and made her presence known by stifled sobs. "When did Master Talbot say he was a-going to Maidstone?"

"To-morrow, father."

"What time?"

"I don't know; he told cook when she was asking about the butcher's meat, that he should dine at Maidstone o' Wednesday."

"Ah! then he's sure to be out of the way betwixt six and nine. Get out my desk and write a letter to Toby just as I tell you."

Jenny opened the desk, and hastily composing herself, sat down with a pen in her hand.

"I'm ready, father," said she.

The steward, who had not ceased to caress his chin, dictated :

"Dear Toby."

"Dear sweetheart!" wrote Jenny, and then waited, smiling at the endearing words.

"The master is going to dine with Mr. Barton at Maidstone," Blake pursued. It was not necessary to state who was to be Tom's host, but the conceited old man never missed an opportunity of displaying his knowledge.

"Yes, father."

"Mr. Barton at Maidstone—have you wrote that? Right—and my father and me will be quite alone. Do not be afraid of my father, he has found out that you are in the power of a bad man, and if you trust him he will get you free, and he will put you in a good place, and he will make Mr. Talbot forgive all that you have done, and he will permit you to court me if you trust him, and do what he tells you. So come to-morrow evening about six o'clock, and my father will be the best friend to you that ever you had."

Having written this, with frequent breaks for correction and amendments, Jenny was instructed to put her name at the bottom.

"May I write a little word or two for myself?" she asked.

The old man graciously accorded permission, and she wrote:

"Dear sweetheart, come about five through the wood, and if you see the little window open, you will know that Mr. Talbot has already gone;" and after that a dozen lines of sentiment, which, being written for her sweetheart only, might seem nothing but sheer nonsense to any other reader.

After supper Jenny placed the letter by the gate-post, and from her bed-room window watched patiently until in the dead of night she saw her lover take it from its hiding-place, and pressing it to his lips, vanish in the obscurity.

CHAPTER XL.

BARNABAS PREPARES FOR BUSINESS.

"If you please, your honour, may I have a few hours this evening?" asked Slink. "I've groomed the hosses, cleaned the stables, and made the bits and stirrups to shine like silver."

Barnabas was in the yard of the roadside inn, near Otford, where they had been staying for the last six days, seated on a

step, his legs stretched out, his back resting against the stable wall, and his hat tilted over his nose. Barnabas puffed at his long clay pipe in silence, while he considered whether policy would justify him in refusing his servant's demand. Slink had lately given him considerable anxiety: a moral as well as physical change had been apparent in the lad since the day he had had his hair cut. There was something more of a man and something less of a fool in his appearance and behaviour. A tap on the pistol-holster no longer awed him; he only blinked when the lock of the pistol was exposed, and Barnabas feared to draw the pistol further for fear Slink, instead of sinking on his knees, should take to his heels. He couldn't afford to lose him, or he might have been tempted to lead him into a quiet part of the road and try the effect of a running shot upon him. He began to fear that sooner or later Slink would bolt, and throw himself upon the mercy of his late master. That would never do.

As harshness seemed to be losing its effect, he had been unwillingly constrained to adopt kindness as a hold upon him, and although he went no further than giving him beer and a few hours of liberty, the result was undoubtedly good. Slink was more cheerful, more ready to play piquet, more responsive to his wishes. Still Barnabas grudged the concession.

"Want to go out again," he snarled, after a dozen silent whiffs. "Have you got the Saint Vitus's dance, or what's the matter with you that you can't stay still in one place for two minutes together?"

"There's nothing to do, master."

"Nothing to do. There's piquet. I owe you your revenge." This was the only debt that Barnabas ever acknowledged. "Nothing to do is the fault you have to find now, eh? A little while ago you were snivelling because we were doing too much. What will content ye, I wonder. Here all for your sake I'm out of pocket for your fine clothes and your hair-dressing, and presents for your sweetheart, and I'm living in the country paying all expenses and treating you as an equal—living as innocent as a plaguey parson, and yet you're not grateful."

"Yes, I am, master. I—I—I'm very much obliged to you, and as to the expenses, you can stop 'em out of my wages."

Barnabas grunted at this suggestion, and after a few more whiffs:

"Well, you can take your few hours now," he said.

"Please, your honour, now won't do."

"Why not?"

" 'Cause I want to take 'em this evening."

" Hum! Where are you going?"

Slink made no reply.

Barnabas raised himself, tilted his hat off his nose so that he could see Slink's face, and repeated the question in an angry tone.

Slink scratched his ear, and finding no means of evading the confession, answered:

" I'm going to see my sweetheart, an' please your honour."

" I don't mind you seeing her," said Barnabas, his small eyes twinkling. " You will just make inquiries about Mr. Talbot; find out what he does all day; but you mustn't mention my name. Yes, you can go; but mind, don't forget that you have a good, indulgent master, and don't look sour when I bid you do your duty. Don't be ungrateful, for ingratitude I can't abide."

" You'll never find me ungrateful, master."

" And another thing—I'm always thinking of your welfare. You keep clear of Mr. Talbot, for if he can string you up on the tree he will. Beware of him."

" Oh, there's no danger, your honour, thanking you kindly for the warning—Master Tummus is going across to Maidstone this afternoon—that's why I'm going a-courting Jenny this evening."

" Why the devil didn't you tell me that at first? Going to Maidstone this afternoon—alone?"

" Don't know, master. One thing's sertain—Master Blake ben't going wi' him."

Barnabas received this information in silence. Pulling his hat over his eyes again, he rested his elbows on his knees, and gave himself up to reflection, biting the waxed end of his pipe.

Slink went off to the stable in high glee, saying to himself that after all his master was a good sort of man at the bottom, and greatly improved since he had given up hunting for his lost property. How he was to serve Barnabas and listen at the same time to the proposals of Jenny's father was a problem which has just taken hold of his mind, when his master called from the yard, where he was still sitting nibbling his pipe-stem.

" Here I be, your honour."

" Slink, you won't be able to see your sweetheart to-night. I am going out, and I shall want you." Barnabas raised his head, and catching sight of Slink's lugubrious face, continued: " Halloa, what's this? Looking glum at the first thing I tell you to do? Ah, I thought how it would be. This comes from being too indulgent."

"You said I might go and see my Jenny," whimpered Slink.

"Yes, and this is all the gratitude you show."

Slink rubbed one foot over the other, and tried to see what he had to be grateful for.

"I'm thinking of your interest now, though it's a precious thankless task," Barnabas pursued. "You want to go back to your old service, don't you?"

"I don't want to be ungrateful, master."

"Answer me straightforward, yes or no—do you want to go back to the Hall?"

"Yes—I—I——"

"Ah, I thought so. You can't do anything, think anything, but I can find it out. I've thought of discharging you some time, but I wouldn't let you go without making sure beforehand that you got a good master. Leave you to yourself and you're bound to go wrong. Besides, if I didn't say a good word for you, you'd be caught and strung up in a brace of shakes. No one would believe your story with that hang-dog face to convict you. Now what I'm going to do is this: to-night, when Mr. Talbot is riding home from Maidstone, I shall trot up to him, tell him the whole truth about the horse, and ask him to forgive you. You can follow a couple of hundred yards behind, and if he agrees to pardon you, I'll give you a call and you may come up and make it all right at once; but if he won't I'll just quietly leave him, and we'll look out for another master. There'll be no harm done in asking him, will there?"

"No master, but will you do all that for me?"

"Yes—though you scarcely deserve it. However, you may show your gratitude afterwards."

"But wouldn't it be better if your honour went up to the Hall to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, you think you have more sense than I have, hey? I would be a pretty fool, indeed, to go up to the Hall, where there's half a dozen men who at a word from their master would arrest me for being your accomplice."

Slink hesitated, he had learnt to doubt the Lieutenant's pretexts for making acquaintances on the road. Still rubbing his feet together, he said with anxiety in his voice,

"You don't think that Master Tummus owes you anything do you, your honour?"

"Not a penny-piece. Look here, you can do as I tell you or not, just as you like, but if you refuse this offer I make, do you know what I shall do?"

"No, your honour."

"I'll go straight off and turn King's evidence against you for

stealing the horse: that will save my neck if it breaks yours. I'm determined I won't be your accomplice any longer. I'm sick of you."

"My accomplice?"

"That's it. Don't be a fool, Slink, and make me angry just at the very moment I'm trying to be nice and kind to you. I'm taking the best and safest method of getting out of the difficulty you led me into, and you haven't the gratitude nor the decency to help me. Do you think your sweetheart will have anything to say to you if you are no wiser nor better than that?"

"I'm not ungrateful, master—I only want to do what's right."

"So do I."

"Shall we have to wear anything over our faces, your honour?"

Barnabas took the crape from his pocket and throwing it to Slink, said:

"You can burn it if you like; now are you satisfied that there's nothing to fear?"

This proof seemed to Slink so convincing that he agreed to act according to his master's instructions, and escaped to the stable to hide his shame in having doubted the honesty of the Lieutenant's intentions.

About seven o'clock they left the inn together, and passing Borough Green and Plaxtol, crossed the main road and following the windings of a long lane, came eventually to Bisford, a spot marked by the "Three Barges," an inn standing a dozen yards from the Medway, at the point where the bye-road from Sevenoaks joined the tow-path to Maidstone Bridge. It was by this route Slink assured his master that Mr. Talbot would probably return, the distance to Talbot Hall being far less, and the lanes more agreeable to a horseman than the main road. It was yet early for one to leave a dinner party: after a minute's consideration, Barnabas led his horse into the yard of the "Three Barges" and dismounted, giving Slink instructions to bait the horses well. From the settle in front of the inn, the tow-path could be seen for a considerable length, and here Barnabas sat until the distance became indistinct. It was nearly nine o'clock when they remounted. Barnabas trotted slowly along the tow-path; Slink followed at a safe distance. Both were on the alert: Slink preparing to fly at a moment's notice, Barnabas taking in the natural advantages of the situation as they passed before his practised eye. There was one space which he stopped to examine minutely. A light vapour

hung over the water, reflecting the twilight of the summer night, but the tow-path shadowed by the wide-spreading boughs of a row of elms was in deep gloom. A gate at one time had crossed the path; only the posts stood now, one by the hedge which lay between the path and the elms, the other upon the steep edge of the river bank. Beyond the hedge rose a corn covered hill; on the opposite side of the river there lay flat meadows. Nothing living was to be seen except the shadowy outline of a cow in the water meadow. The "Three Barges" lay half a mile behind.

Turning in his saddle, Barnabas called to Slink:

"How far to Maidstone Bridge?"

"A mile and a half or thereabouts."

Barnabas turned his horse and walked back to Slink, looking at the hedge.

"Can you get through the hedge anywhere?" he asked.

"There's a gap lower down, your honour."

"Get through and put yourself under cover, There are not many folks come along here this time of night, hey?"

"Not one a week."

"Stay by your horse in the lee of the hedge until you hear me call. If I don't come for three hours, wait. You can think of all the good things that are likely to happen. I am going on to Maidstone, and when you hear me call you, your Mr. Talbot won't owe you any grudge."

"I—I—don't seem to have much courage, master—I—I hope it will be all right."

"If you obey it will be all right; if you don't you'll hang, or I'm a Dutchman,"

Barnabas retraced his steps slowly until he came to the two posts; then he dismounted and tested the strength of the posts. They were firm enough for his purpose. From under the rolled cloth on the bow of his saddle he took a closely bound bank of cord; unwound, it was a six yards' length of three stranded line not thicker than an ordinary pencil, but tough as wire. One end he tied to the post by the hedge, the other to the post on the bank, forming a barrier about two feet from the ground and invisible in the gloom. Having tested its strength, and satisfied himself that it was reliable, Barnabas remounted, and trotted off towards Maidstone.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BUSINESS IS DONE.

"SHALL I go by the road or the tow-path?" Tom asked himself as he passed the gate and walked his horse over Maidstone Bridge. The road was hard and uninteresting; the tow-path was turfed; for a full mile; the river was seductive. There is ever a tender sentiment in flowing water, and Tom's heart being open at this moment to the influence of sentiment, he took the tow-path. A man is never more ready to take an amiable and hopeful view of society and himself than when he has been drinking good claret. Tom had drunk a bottle of excellent claret, and as he trotted beside the grey river he felt happier than he had been for many days.

He was not a spiritual being, with a soul independent in its action to the movement of a liver, but simply a man of firm flesh and untainted blood with moral attributes more or less subject to the guidance of circumstances.

Having chosen the path chiefly for the opportunity it gave him for indulging in reverie, he closed his eyes to everything but the mental figure of Lady Betty—even to the soft surroundings of grey river and star-lit landscape, which gave tone to his reflections.

Not a sound disturbed his sweet and dreamy thoughts, until leaving the turf his horse's hoofs clattered on a harder path. The lively ring seemed to awaken more vigorous ideas. Putting his horse to a trot, he said, as if to conclude the subject of his meditation: "Ah, well! if I can but manage to keep away for a few months until my Lady Betty's mind is resolved, all may be well—all must be well. If she has found no one more lovable than me, then 'twill be joy for both of us, and if 'tis my fate to learn that there is another man capable of making her happier than she might have been with me, why then," with a sigh, "so much the better for her, sweet girl."

What was the sound that mingled with the rattle of his horse's hoofs—an echo? He reined in and turned upon the saddle, for the sound, unabating, came from behind. He could see nothing, for a bend in the river interposed a veil of mist, but clearly a horseman was following. Had he forgotten and left behind anything, and was it Barton in the rear? No; Barton had complained of his horse being dead lame as an excuse for not accompanying him on the road. Was it an honest man or a rascal? The probabilities were so equally balanced as to

give no choice. He put his horse to the gallop for a couple of minutes, and then reined in quickly. The horseman behind was galloping, and Tom had no longer any doubt as to his character. What was to be done? To turn his horse and war for his adversary in a narrow path shaded by trees would be unwise.

"We will have a race for it until we reach the open," said Tom, "and then——" he opened his holsters.

It was pitch dark beneath the trees, and at a break in the path Tom was within an ace of being pitched into the river. "I won't break my mare's knees for a confounded time," said he, checking her pace to a trot.

He could hear that his pursuer had not relaxed his speed, and was gaining ground quickly. Nevertheless he kept the mare at a brisk trot, feeling certain that he must be near an opening which he remembered.

"Stop, curse you!" cried Barnabas, now within a dozen yards of Tom.

The cry had the effect he desired. Tom's mare, more frightened than he, broke away with a bound, and the next minute her legs were struck under her by the extended cord, and she fell upon the line, shooting Tom out of the saddle and on to the bank, and the mare and he lay as still as the dead.

Rapidly dismounting, for the mare lay across the path, Barnabas looked for the thrown man, and caught sight of the dark body lying half over the bank, and clearly defined against the grey mist of the water. Standing by the fallen horse, he cocked his pistol, levelled it at Tom's lifeless body, and fired. At the same instant—perhaps startled by the detonation—the mare struggled to gain her feet, and struck her iron heels against the right shin of Barnabas. He fell with a scream, while she, plunging wildly, went over the bank, and, with a splash, into the water.

"Slink!" roared Barnabas.

"What's the matter, master; what's happened?" cried Slink, running up.

"My leg's broke, that's what's the matter. What's that sound?"

"Voices, master; somebody's coming. Good Lord! what have you done?"

"Voices! Get my other pistol. Quick, or it will be the worse for you. Do you hear?"

"Yes, master, yes. But dear heart! don't you think you've done enough mischief with t'other? You'll break your other leg, maybe."

"Plague take you, my pistol! What's that?"

"I've dropped it, master, and I can't find it, and--oh, my goodness! there's the voices again."

A volley of oaths, and then Barnabas cried, "Bring my horse closer—lift me up. Oh!" More oaths as Slink raised him upon his left leg, and he laid his arm over the saddle. "Now catch hold of my left leg and lift."

Slink obeyed, enabling his master to lie across the saddle, and following his instructions, led the horse along the path to the gap, a couple of hundred yards below, and through it into the cornfield where Slink's horse was patiently browsing under the cover of the hedge.

"Lift me off, and for your own sake handle me carefully. Quick, or I shall swoon."

When he was laid upon the ground, and had taken a gulp of spirits from a bottle, he said, between his groans and oaths,

"I don't hear any voices now."

"I do," said Slink, trembling. As a matter of fact the voices, if they had existed outside of Slink's apprehensions, were silent now.

"So much the better," said Barnabas. "It will be necessary for you to look sharp if you wish to escape hanging."

"What's to do now, your honour?" asked Slink, trembling in every limb.

"Talbot's been thrown from his horse, and lies there by the water's edge with his neck broke. If he's found there you'll be hanged for it. Go back and shove his body into the river."

"I couldn't your honour, I couldn't," Slink whispered.

"What, afraid of a corpse! Go and do it, or by George I'll call out for assistance and swear you murdered him?"

"For the love of heaven spare me, master, dear!"

"Go and do it; 'tis to save your own neck. Go, or I will call murder. Are you going? Mur——"

"Don't call, master, I'll do it. He's dead, you say?"

Barnabas raised himself to answer; a scream escaped his lips, which terrified Slink into immediate obedience, and as he departed his master fell back in a swoon with the agony of his fractured limb.

By slight degrees he slowly returned to consciousness. First he saw the boughs over his head, and through them the stars in the still heavens; then he heard the horses cropping the vegetation; then he felt pains in his leg: finally he recollected what had taken place. He felt cold about the throat, and putting his hand up felt that he was wet. How had that come about? He had not fallen in the water. Where was Slink?

Had he left him there to fare for himself, and escaped to save his own neck? No, the horses were there. He called, and a slight rattling noise, which he had noticed without being able to account for it, ceased as Slink answered:

"Here I be, master," and he crawled into sight showing a face that was visible in the gloom by its ghastly pallor. "You're not dead, are you master?" he asked, anxiously.

"No," answered Barnabas, in a mild tone—grateful, not to Slink for his fidelity, but to the luck that had not entirely forsaken him. "What's this wet on my neck—it isn't blood, is it?"

"No; only water. Seeing you was dead I went and fetched a hatful of water to bring you to life. Thank mercy you're alive, master! Oh, what a night this has been!"

"Put your finger in your mouth if you can't keep your teeth still. Do you think I want the castanets to cheer me up? Well, have you done it?"

"Done what, master?"

"Pitched Talbot's body in the river."

Slink gulped as though his dry throat choked utterance, then: "Yes, I have," he said, and added fervently, "may God forgive me!"

"Well, go on; tell me how you did it."

"I can't—I can't. Oh, when I rolled him down the bank, and he lay there in the water, with his face all white except for the dark stain, all white and turned towards me from among the rushes——"

"Great powers! You didn't leave him like that to bear witness against me? You shoved him in altogether?"

"Don't ask me; for mercy's sake don't ask me!" said Slink, in a terror that made his speech hardly intelligible.

"One word, fool. Did you shove his head in or not?"

"Yes, I did," and then, sinking on his knees, Slink said again, "God forgive me!"

CHAPTER XLII.

ILL TIDINGS.

MRS. WALKER stood in her drawing-room arranging the ribbons of her elegant bonnet before a glass. Lady Betty sat near a window working at a strip of embroidery.

"Once more, Lady Betty, will you accompany me?" asked Mrs. Walker.

"Once more, Felicia, and at the risk of being thought ungrateful, no."

"'Twill be the best and genteelest entertainment of the season."

"I hope you will enjoy it. You shall tell me all about it to-morrow; that will increase your pleasure."

"You can change your dress in half an hour, and I shall wait willingly."

"Why do you press me? 'Tis a waste of sweetness, like singing to the drowsy."

"It has been said that my singing would cure the drowsy of their weakness. If I thought my powers of persuasion were equally potent I would not tire until I had cured you."

"Why should you take such pains?"

"Because your symptoms are grave, and gravity of any sort is repugnant to me."

"Is there no season when it becomes one to be grave?"

"Yes; but happily the season does not set in before forty." Mrs. Walker seated herself.

"You will be late, Felicia."

"No; the invitation was for four, and 'tis only on the stroke of six. I think I shall set the fashion of stating the hour at which an entertainment is to close instead of that at which it should commence. 'Twould be more reasonable."

"Then for your own sake do nothing of the sort; for if you are suspected of being reasonable you will certainly be convicted of being unfashionable."

"Ah me! Your case is very bad indeed," sighed Mrs. Walker.

"How long do you think it will be, Lady Betty, before you smile again?"

"I cannot say; for the sake of appearances I hope I shall not smile again—before I find something to smile at."

"My dear, I know the secret of your gravity and sarcasm, and shall take upon myself to give you a lecture. You are thinking about that ill-mannered young gentleman, Mr. Tom Talbot."

"I do not know any ill-mannered gentleman of that name."

"Well, we will not call him a gentleman, if the definition is incorrect—this highly-respectable barbarian who was called to order by our friend Gerard Crewe for insulting you."

"Who told you that?" asked Lady Betty, quickly.

"No one. I drew my conclusion, which seems to be correct, from the fact that neither you nor Mr. Crewe would give me any information of what occurred in the library when the challenge was given. Our barbarian does not conceal his faults,

and we can imagine how he would misbehave himself if his untamed passions were provoked. The offence was so unpardonable that Mr. Crewe found it necessary to punish him. At that moment you had every reason to be satisfied. Your affront was about to be avenged; a well-bred gentleman undertook to risk his life as your champion, and make you the talk of society, and the envy of your friends. But with strange perversity you closed your eyes to the advantages of your position, and lost your senses as completely as Ophelia. To be sure you didn't drown yourself; but that was no fault of yours, you got as wet as you could. When the result of the meeting was known, your joy was almost as terrible as your fears had been. Altogether, for about twenty-four hours you suffered as much romantic emotion as the heroine of a tragedy—and for whom? For the gentleman who risked his life for your honour—who spared his rival for your sake—who waits upon you day by day with untiring devotion—whose generous love, unencouraged by a single smile, unrewarded by one word of acknowledgment, seeks constantly to gratify your unexpressed desires—who bears with you patiently in your womanly follies and caprice, and takes your passive tolerance as the guerdon of his affection—a gentleman, handsome, well-bred, and gracious—was it in his peril you suffered—in his safety you rejoiced? No. 'Twas for a man the very opposite of him—a man rough and rude as the savage from the woods, intolerant and unappreciative, a tyrant who would be a slave, a slave who would be a tyrant; a barbarian, who having offended does not seek forgiveness, who having frightened you to desperation, values your sympathy so little that he leaves you in despair and allows his rival to relieve your fears——”

“You exaggerate to extravagance.”

“I deny it. Who was it came to tranquillise your mind after the meeting—the man you loved or the man that loved you?”

“Gerard does not love me in the sense that you imply. He is my friend simply.”

“And mine also; but if he paid me the same attention my husband would not be jealous without a cause. What extravagance can you prove against me? Is it not the bare truth that from the day he affronted you, Mr. Talbot has not once called upon you?”

“I forbade—that is—it was my wish that he should cease to visit me.”

“I do not take obedience as a proof of love, nor you either. Tell me candidly why you have refused invitations since the meeting; why you have stayed within doors from morning

until night; why you start when you hear a visitor arrive; and, lastly, tell me why you are sitting by that open window? You are silent—your conscience tells you that you expect him to disobey."

"My conscience tells me nothing of the sort. You are quite wrong, Felicia."

"Then why do you refuse to accompany me this afternoon? Be candid, Lady Betty—you owe me an explanation. You will find me more indulgent as a confidant than as a successful inquisitor, and I assure you I never suffer my curiosity to rest unsatisfied."

"'Tis not fear of ridicule that makes me reticent," said Lady Betty, after a few moments of thoughtful silence. "But on some subjects we differ so completely that it is useless to discuss them—and painful also when one feels deeply. However, I will not suffer my reserve to reduce you to the unamiable task of examining into the secrets of your friend."

"Thank you, my dear," Mrs. Walker replied, with a graceful bow.

"I do love Mr. Talbot. I love him with all my heart. You would like to know why. It is a question I have hardly asked myself. I admire him for those very barbaric qualities that you deprecate, perhaps for qualities that you have not recognised, and would not admire if you did."

"I should like to know them all the same."

"Strength of heart, fidelity, trust——"

"Et cetera. He has no fault, I suppose?"

"None that time will not remove."

"Well, thank the stars you may outlive him by a dozen years. Go on, dear."

"There is no act of his that I can justify——"

"Even to his late neglect?"

"'Tis not neglect, but the faithful execution of a plan which we conceived necessary to my happiness. I acknowledge that after the duel I hoped he would break through his resolution and come to me; now I rejoice that he was stronger than I."

"I see. It is the fear that he may yet succumb which makes you so anxious when a knock at the door announces a visitor; and you refuse to leave the house in order that you may not lose the opportunity of reprimanding him for his error if he should come, hey?"

"No. I do not expect him, nor hope ——" She stopped abruptly as the sound of a voice upon the stairs reached her ears.

Mrs. Walker laughed lightly and kept her eyes fixed on Lady Betty's anxious face. The door opened, and the servant announced:

"Mr. Gerard Crewe."

A ray of satisfaction lit up Lady Betty's face, much to the perplexity of Mrs. Walker.

Gerard entered, went through the form of salutation mechanically, and took a seat in silence. Lady Betty felt that she was being watched, and took up the embroidery in her trembling fingers. Unusually constrained and ill at ease, Gerard fixed his eyes on her for a moment, dropped them, raised them again, without opening his lips. Highly amused with a fancied discovery, Mrs. Walker, after contemplating the two friends for some moments, rose, saying with a malicious smile:

"Mr. Crewe, you will forgive me, I am sure, if I leave you to the entertainment of Lady Betty." Then crossing to Lady Betty, she said a few words of farewell, and bending down to kiss her, added in a whisper:

"I understand now why you do not wish Mr. Talbot to return. You are a more consummate coquette than I thought. May the best man win, dear."

Gerard closed the door after Mrs. Walker, and took a seat near Lady Betty, saying:

"My mission has taken me longer than I expected, and I have only painful news to give you.

"Painful news?" murmured Lady Betty, as if uncertain of what she heard.

"You must summon your fortitude to hear that which my tongue must falter to tell."

"Tom is ill!" She rose quickly and threw aside her work, as though prepared to go at once to the relief of the man she loved.

"It is not illness. Sit down, Lady Betty, unfortunately you can do nothing to lessen the calamity."

"That word is ill-chosen, if he is not ill. Tell me what has happened without hesitation. I am prepared for painful news. You have not found Tom, or he has left England—but that is not a calamity, and I can hear worse than that bravely."

"A misfortune that leaves us hope is to be borne —"

Lady Betty interrupted him; laying her hand upon his arm, and speaking scarcely above her breath, she asked:

"Is Tom dead?"

"We can only hope that he is not."

"Ah, you are trying to break the fall of this blow. You

are concealing the truth from me. I know all; I read it in your trembling lips and pitying eye—Tom is dead. My poor fond Tom is lost to me for ever. Be merciful and tell me the truth with cruel words that my heart may break with the shock."

"Be calm—there is hope."

"Oh, God bless you for that word, you good friend—dear Gerard! What a foolish girl am I to think the worst at a mere word; scold me, Gerard, for my folly."

"My poor child—there is hope, but it is so slight——"

"That it were better there was none! True. Why should we encourage a fearful suspense. Let us realise the truth at once and not believe the fact. Tom is dead, is he not?"

"It may be best to think so, indeed."

Lady Betty fixed her eyes upon Gerard in a bewilderment of agony, and was silent for a moment, then taking his hand between hers she said in low reproach:

"Oh Gerard—we loved each other, we two—Tom with his whole heart, and I with mine, and love is more than life. For two to die is nothing, but for me to live and lose, is terrible. Think, I lost my mother but two months since, would you add to that loss a greater still? Tell me, he is not dead—cheat my senses for a little while with seeming truths. I am simple and easily beguiled. You shake your head, and yet you profess to love me. Can you see me suffer, and offer no word of consolation—I do not weep, but I suffer here—here at my heart, beating slow and leaden as though the life had gone out with the love I planted there. Pity me! give me a word of comfort, for I cannot cry. You have tears in your eyes, and suffer too, but not as I do. Say a word to me, no matter what—but do not look at me in silent sorrow, so."

"I will tell you all that has happened, and you shall use your woman's wit to catch the rays of hope."

"Yes, yes—I will listen calmly and patiently—tell me all, leave not a word unsaid. Hide nothing, be the facts ever so ghastly. Women are strong in scenes of terror, and do not shudder to look upon a gaping wound that they may find the means to heal."

"I will tell you faithfully all that has occurred since I left you on Tuesday. I knew that if anyone could tell me where to find our friend Tom it would be Dr. Blandly, and I went first to Edmonton where he lives. There I learnt that the Doctor had left home hastily and gone to Talbot Hall in Kent, on business of urgent importance. I followed him and arrived at Talbot Hall the same night. Doctor Blandly was in deep

distress, for Tom, who has been staying at the Hall since we last saw him, was missing, and up to that moment no trace of him found. On Wednesday afternoon, he left the Hall to dine with a friend at Maidstone. Late at night, as the steward's daughter was watching at her window, Tom's mare ran up riderless to the lodge gate. Her knees were cut, and her saddle wet. The steward started off at once to make inquiries at Maidstone, and found that Tom had left his friend about ten o'clock. As soon as it was light a search was begun. The steward took the first London coach and sought Doctor Blandly. When he arrived, a few hours before me, nothing had been discovered. While he was telling me this, the steward returned to the Hall bringing with him Tom's hat, which had been found in a sluice some distance below Maidstone. It was conjectured then that he had followed the upper bank of the river, and in attempting to ford it had been carried away by the force of the current."

"But he could swim. He was master of all manly exercises. Oh! I know he is safe! Why do you despair?—for you do: your face tells me so."

"Yesterday morning as soon as it was light, the search was recommenced. The keeper of the bridge-gate believed that a gentleman on horse had crossed the bridge at ten, and while some explored the path below the bridge, where poor Tom's hat had been found, others examined the tow-path which leads on the lower side of the river towards a bye-road communicating with the neighbourhood of Talbot Hall. It was there that we found new traces. There was a broken cord upon the posts of an old gateway. On the river bank beside it were the marks of a horse's hoofs, and a little further on the reeds were crushed and broken, foot-prints were upon the bank, and a trail by the rushes as though a heavy body had been drawn over the soft mud."

"That showed that he had drawn himself from the water."

"I fear not—the herbage and rushes were depressed and matted in the yielding clay towards the water, and not from it."

"Then what do you conclude?"

"A week or ten days since Tom was shot at in a wood; and it is only too greatly to be feared that the same murderous hand stretched the cord across the path which threw Tom's mare, and afterwards dragged his lifeless body into the river."

"Oh, Heavens! What else have you to tell?"

"Nothing. We found no more."

"You only confirm my despair. You leave me no space for hope."

"One fact alone forbids despair; we have not found Tom's body. The river has been dragged between the place where he was thrown, and the sluice where his hat was discovered, without result. It is possible that he was only stunned by the fall from his mare, and restored to consciousness by the immersion in the river he saved himself by swimming to the bank."

"Why that is more than possible—it must be so."

"But he has not returned to the Hall. And we have inquired at the inns beside the river for miles, and no one has seen him."

"Then all is lost."

"The current is strong, for the river has been swollen by the heavy rains of last week, and our one hope is, that when consciousness returned to him he was far down the river. Exhausted, perhaps hurt, he may be waiting in some remote cottage until he has sufficient strength to return to us."

"I pray God it may be so," said Lady Betty, clasping her hands, and speaking with all the fervour of her soul.

Gerard bent his head, and added his silent prayer to hers.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DOCTOR BLANDLY IN STANHOPE STREET.

A FORTNIGHT later Doctor Blandly called at the house in Stanhope Street, presented his card, and asked to see Miss Elizabeth St. Cyr. He was shown into the reception-room. The Doctor advanced to the middle of the room, and standing there looked round him with the curiosity of a student who has learnt to gauge the character of people by the things they use in their every-day life.

"Very elegant, very elegant indeed," said he, running his eye over the furniture and appointments, "and about as hideous as the mind of man can conceive."

He took off his glasses to rub them before examining the pictures more closely, and was still polishing them with his yellow silk handkerchief when the door opened, and Mrs. Walker entered the room.

"Doctor Blandly, I presume," she said, with an amiable smile.

The Doctor adjusted his glasses carefully upon his nose, looked at Mrs. Walker attentively, and then answered:

"Yes, that is my name; but unless I am greatly mistaken

in your age, you are not the young woman I have come to see."

Unaccustomed to plain speaking, Mrs. Walker for a moment could not decide whether to resent or pass over Doctor Blandly's brusquerie; however, her curiosity to know the object of his visit induced her to regard him merely as an amusing original.

"I am Mrs. Walker, the bosom friend of Lady Betty, who is now, at my persuasion, taking the air, but I expect her to return shortly."

"In that case I will wait for Miss St. Cyr, if you will allow me."

Mrs. Walker made a courteous reply, and begged her visitor to take a chair. The Doctor scanned the collection of chairs, and selecting one from the further end of the room which seemed more trustworthy to sit upon than the rest, he placed it in front of Mrs. Walker and seated himself, saying:

"If the frames of your chairs were as stout as the frames of your pictures, madam, there would be less danger in using them for their legitimate purpose: if this room were mine, I would make a bench of the pictures, and hang up the chairs to look at."

"You object to elegance, Doctor Blandly."

"No, madam; for elegance, as I take it, is that perfect harmony of one part with another which we find in Nature's handiwork; but where is the harmony between my figure and the chair I sit upon with trembling? 'Tis as if one set the legs of a gazelle under the body of an elephant."

"You are a humourist, Doctor Blandly."

The Doctor made a stiff bow, took a pinch of snuff, and showed no inclination to re-open the conversation. Mrs. Walker felt that she must either leave him or come to direct questions.

"May I ask if you have made any discovery relative to poor Mr. Talbot?" she asked.

"None. We have found not a sign nor trace since the second day of our search."

Doctor Blandly heaved a sigh, looked on the ground with raised eyebrows, and tapped the table with his fingers, while Mrs. Walker asked herself what could be the object of his visit to Lady Betty.

"I am naturally very deeply interested in the unfortunate gentleman, for Lady Betty was deeply attached to him, and is inconsolable for his loss."

"Inconsolable, madam? and he has been lost a fortnight!" exclaimed Doctor Blandly, with awakened interest.

"I assure you it is true. I have done all I could to make her forget him, but in vain. She refuses to go to the opera, to Ranelagh, to tea-parties, to routs, and secludes herself in her own room when I have visitors."

"I can scarcely understand a friend of yours being dull to such attractions."

"Yet 'tis the fact," said Mrs. Walker, acknowledging the compliment with a bow. "I admit that my patience is almost exhausted."

"Such obstinacy would try the patience of a saint."

"And 'tis entirely for her own sake that I use my persuasions. She is wasting her time, perhaps jeopardizing her future happiness, by giving way to these morbid regrets, which avail nothing. Tears cannot revive the dead."

"The truest words you ever spoke, madam."

"I am glad to find that you agree with me, Doctor Blandly."

"I hope you will never find me wanting in sense, Mrs. Walker."

Mrs. Walker flirted her fan, and greatly encouraged by the Doctor's ambiguity, which she interpreted as a compliment to herself, proceeded:

"Lady Betty is in a position to make an admirable match. She is young, pretty, and has, it seems, a very useful little fortune. She might reasonably hope to marry a young man of title: that was, I believe, her mother's dying wish, and the dying wish of a mother should be observed as a sacred duty, in my opinion; what do you think, Doctor?"

Doctor Blandly considered the sanctity of a mother's dying wish unquestionable.

"Now Mr. Talbot, although possessed of a good estate, had no title, and his behaviour in company was most awkward. He could not conform himself with the habits of society, and when he tried to do so he made himself ridiculous. He had a habit of contradicting people, and setting them right if they happened to make errors, which was extremely provoking, and he absolutely went to sleep in his seat during a very elegant performance of an oratorio by amateurs of distinguished rank. He made no secret of his dislike to the modern usages of London society, and I have not the slightest doubt that had he married Lady Betty he would have taken her away for nine months out of the twelve, to spend one half her time in a country Hall where it was impossible to keep awake, and the other half in foreign cities, where it was impossible to go to sleep. And so, to be quite candid, I must admit that—for her sake—I am not sorry to hear that you have not found Mr.

Talbot. This morbid condition is not natural to her, and if we are fortunate enough to hear no more of Mr. Talbot, she will soon recover her health and spirits, and we may hope to find her a suitable husband amongst the many admirers she is sure to find at the Wells, where I propose to take her next month. You don't think it probable that Mr. Talbot is alive, Doctor Blandly?"

"I cannot hope!"

"Nor I, neither. Nothing is further from my hopes, I assure you, and so let us trust that we have heard the last of him, and that he is in a happier world."

"You may rely upon your devout wish being gratified. If, as you hope, Mr. Talbot is in a better world than this, rest assured, madam, that you have seen the last of him."

CHAPTER XLIV.

LADY BETTY REACHES A TURNING-POINT.

WHEN Lady Betty returned from her drive, she was met in the hall by Mrs. Walker.

"My dear Lady Betty, a gentleman is waiting to see you."

Lady Betty's heart leaped and her lip trembled. She had not yet relinquished the hope that Tom would return to her.

"A gentleman!" she echoed.

"An old gentleman. A perfect original. A most amusing old quiz, I protest. Doctor Blandly."

"Has he brought me news?"

"Not a word. I have been trying for the last half-hour to discover the object of his visit, but either he is very stupid or very ill-mannered, for I could get nothing out of him. I am inclined to think from his concluding observations that he considers himself clever. He is in the reception-room; go, my dear, and see what you can make of him."

Lady Betty opened the door at once, and found herself for the first time face to face with Doctor Blandly. Her mother's description of him as he appeared in his gardening dress had led her to imagine him an untidy, coarse old man; it astonished her to find him as he was—a particularly neat, fair-complexioned, portly gentleman, with a shapely leg, a handsome satin waistcoat, a snowy frill, and a well-curled wig.

She made him a low courtesy, which he acknowledged, and then drawing near the window, he placed a chair for her in the

light, where he could see her more perfectly. She took the seat, and he, bringing his chair directly in front of her, seated himself, and after looking at her pale, anxious face for a moment in silence, said :

"Your face tells me who you are, young lady, not from its resemblance to any face that I have seen, but that it answers to my expectations, and, let me add, my hopes. You are the Lady Betty that poor Tom gave his heart to."

Lady Betty's chin twitched; she tried to answer, failed, and dropped her head upon her bosom as the tears started to her eyes.

"Do not speak; I will do all the talking for awhile. I am Doctor Blandly. Give me your hand, so. Let us who were strangers to each other be friends. Tom has left a space in our hearts that we must seek to fill with new affections. He was dear to me, and I am an old man, but to you, with younger thoughts and sympathies ——"

"He was my life. I did not know how dear he was to me. I am like a child learning to value blessings by their loss."

"'Tis an unfinished lesson to the oldest," said Doctor Blandly, gently. The tone of commiseration touched her to the heart. His sympathy was the first she had received. Gerard had sought only to console her; Mrs. Walker endeavoured to reason her out of suffering; other friends she had none. She cried freely now, and Doctor Blandly did not attempt to restrain her tears. Purposely the old pathologist lanced her wound, knowing the relief it would produce, and he encouraged the outflow of her grief by gentle words of pity. After awhile her weeping ended in a long, shuddering sigh, and she wiped her eyes with a brave resolve to cry no more. But her soul was full of gratitude to the pitying Doctor; she pressed his hands between her moist, hot palms, and looking in his face wondered how any one could mistake him for a misanthrope and a woman-hater.

"No man who disliked women could be so womanly tender," she thought; "no wonder 'I'om loved him." Then her thoughts returned to her lost lover. "You have brought me no hopeful news?" she asked, wistfully.

"No, my child; the news I have to give you is not good."

"Has his body been found?"

"Even that poor consolation is denied us. It is concluded that he was carried by the current far down the river, and that the shore-folk robbed him of his clothes, and sunk his corpse to avoid inquiry. We shall never know where he lies."

Lady Betty, sighing, shook her head and lapsed into a reverie,

which Doctor Blandly did not interrupt. He wished her to exhaust her present grief before opening the subject which had brought him to her.

"No mound of green turf to mark his resting-place, no spot where one might cherish flowers to his memory," murmured she.

"He has your tears. A marble is not needed to keep his memory sacred in your heart."

"I do not know, Doctor Blandly, I am not sure of myself. I wished to die when I heard that he was dead, but I live. This morning, though I did not eat, I felt quite hungry. Perhaps I shall cease to grieve one day."

"I hope so ; you are too young and too healthy to brood long upon your sorrow."

"But 'tis heartless to forget the one we love."

"'Tis evil to repine when nature bids us smile. Be true to yourself, child ; weep when you grieve, eat when you are hungry, laugh when you are pleased. Leave false sentiment to false people—to creatures who cumber the earth and do no good in it ; to fools who cramp their souls, as the Chinese cramp their feet for fashion's sake ; fools like the woman of this house here, who could put on a pious enthusiasm and lay aside her Godless indifference if the mode changed."

The Doctor frowned, took out his snuff-box, and tapped it angrily. Lady Betty opened her eyes in astonishment at the rapid transition of his temper.

"Come, I don't wish to frighten you," he said in a subdued tone, catching the startled expression on her face. "You have a rough old doctor to deal with, who has seen such grievous miseries in the world that he has lost pity for sham ailments, and those who will not be well. Your body is weak, probably by fasting when you should have been eating, and that accounts for the gloomy hopes of perpetual sorrow that you wish to encourage. Eat and drink, my dear, and sleep when you may. Be strong and brave to the utmost of your power, and, above all, be true to nature and yourself. The angels shall acquit you of heartlessness, and your own conscience will be satisfied."

Then the Doctor took his pinch of snuff, replaced the box quietly in his pocket, and dusted himself carefully with his India handkerchief. Lady Betty watched the play of his features with furtive glances, until he fixed his eyes on her face, and looked at her with troubled uncertainty.

"My dear," said he—"I have news for you, concerning your temporal position, which will give you trouble ; and I am in hesitation whether to tell you now or to wait until your health is more robust."

"I can bear to hear anything now, Doctor Blandly."

"Well, then, you shall hear what your friend Mrs. Walker has been endeavouring to find out for half an hour and more. In the first, I presume that you know nothing of the pecuniary position in which you were placed at your mother's death."

"She told me that she had placed her property in your hands for disposal, and her attorney sent me a sum of money about a month since, as a quarterly payment of the interest arising from it. That is all I know. After mamma's death I was too troubled for a time to think of such trifles, and he—Tom assured me one day that I need not bestow any thought upon the matter."

"If he were living it would still be unnecessary. Your mamma loved you very much, my child, but she was not a wise woman, nor a considerate woman. It was her dream that she should see you married to a wealthy husband before she died. To realise that dream she considered it necessary to occupy a position in society which the mere per-centage of her money could not procure."

"Doctor Blandly—are you obliged to tell me this?"

"I do not willingly undertake a painful task; it is only because I think it necessary that I disclose the fact which others besides your mother have tried to keep secret. You cannot accept without inquiry a bare statement of the consequences attending your mother's inconsiderate act?"

"Tell me the result, and let me question afterwards if it is necessary."

"When the money you have now is spent, you will be penniless."

"Penniless," echoed Lady Betty, unable at once to grasp the meaning of the word.

"You have nothing more to receive. Do you comprehend all which that implies?"

"I will try to do so—when my purse is empty I shall have nothing to give the servant who waits on me; when my dresses are worn out—if I wish to leave my friend—if I stay—oh!" she clasped her hands as she realised that henceforth she must depend upon hospitality for a roof and charity for clothes.

"Shall I explain how this comes about?" asked the Doctor coldly.

"No," she cried with quickened energy. "If my degradation is due to any act of my mother's let it be hid for ever."

"Remember the money was entrusted to me—a perfect stranger to your mother."

"But not to Tom nor—nor to me, I am content to accept the result of my mother's act without questioning her love or your honour."

Doctor Blandly bowed, but his forehead lost none of its creases, and he resorted to his snuff-box for the means of solving the difficulty before him.

"I am afraid," said he, "that you will not get that inquisitive woman, Mrs. Walker, to accept the result with your unanimity, Miss Betty."

"It is no business of hers."

"That is precisely my reason for expecting her to meddle with it to a very considerable extent. If you know how to cope with all the subtle attacks of an idle, curious, unprincipled woman, I am content to leave the matter as it stands."

"If I tell her that I have lost my fortune, and refuse to explain how, what can she learn?"

"The truth possibly. If not she will imagine a cause, and publish it as a fact to sustain her own reputation. Does she know that I acted for your mother?"

"Yes—she asked me, and I told her."

Doctor Blandly smiled, and rising from his chair said—"Well, well, we will see what happens. If in a week a lie circulates and reaches your ear, I shall be happy to disprove it."

"Wait—I see what might happen. It did not strike me at first. You might be accused of misappropriating the money."

"Oh, I should take no notice of that," replied the Doctor, sturdily. "That's a lie that could do you no harm. What I fear is, that the woman may resent your silence, and lay the blame upon you, or—one who is dearer to you perhaps, than yourself."

"You mean Tom. But how could she introduce his name into an affair with which he had nothing to do?"

"She might discover that he had something to do with it?"

"A word from you would disprove that."

"You are in error—I could not disprove it by any number of words."

"You shall tell me all. How can he be concerned?"

"You wish me now to tell you all?"

"Yes—I—I—I am not consistent perhaps, but I could not rest with anything that concerns *him* untold."

"There is little to shock you in what I have to tell—and take this from me, my dear Miss Betty—concealment is more terrible than revelation; no harm ever was done by telling and knowing the truth, but from blinking it there has been more misery

on this earth than you can suppose. When we admit that your mother was loving and unwise, we give her blame and praise, that reduces her no lower than the level of womankind. To be deeply loving and deeply wise at the same time, seems hardly possible to our humanity. Look at your mother as a woman whose love exceeded her wisdom, and you can hardly regret her folly."

A faint smile of gratitude passed over Lady Betty's face, and she nodded her head.

"Your mother, influenced by her hopes for your welfare, against my dissuasions determined on investing all her money in an annuity terminable at her death. She would not believe that her tenure of life was uncertain, though I warned her of her danger, and allowed my temper to express itself in no measured terms.

"Seeing the ruin that impended over you, I resolved to purchase the annuity with a sum of money Tom Talbot had desired me to invest for him, knowing that he would be just, and, more than that, generous towards you. He knew nothing of the contract until your mother's death. I wished him to refund what remained of your mother's capital; but to spare you the knowledge of your mother's indiscretion he refused the proposition, and desired that the annuity should be extended to you."

"Oh! my good, generous Tom."

"Alas, you have reason now to regret his generosity. Had he followed my advice you would now have had sufficient to secure you a moderate income."

"Then I thank God I have nothing."

"Hum! You have not learnt much from the teaching of Mrs. Walker, or it has been of a negative kind. I doubt if any amount of generous sentiments would compensate her for the loss of eighteenpence."

"He could have obliged me to sever myself from the society he disliked had he chosen to exercise the power he possessed."

"He might, Heaven be praised, Tom's faults were of a manly kind," said Doctor Blandly, sententiously. "Well, to come to the end of the poor fellow's praises, the day before his duel he made me witness his will, which disposed of his property in two equal portions—one half for you, the other as I expect for me. Now don't cry again, my child—it was a foolish will, and what the deuce he did with it no one knows. In his modesty he omitted to put my name in the document he showed me, and after it was fairly set out he took it away to insert the name. Possibly, he destroyed it when he left the field safe and sound; possibly, he had it in one of his pockets when he was

thrown into the river, the result is the same. No will is to be found, and the whole estate reverts to his next of kin. That next of kin has made his appearance, and put in his claim.

"I am sorry to say his title cannot be disputed. From him one can expect neither generosity nor justice. He has a sharp lawyer at his back, and every penny to which the law entitles him will be called in. And now, my child, you know all my bad news."

Lady Betty smiled with a sigh of relief to find the bad news so good. There was nothing in it she regretted now. Even her mother's fault seemed kind in the light thrown upon it by Doctor Blandly.

"You will wonder, Miss Betty," said Doctor Blandly, after a pause, in which he watched the young pale face attentively, "why I don't take my hat and bid you good morning. When a raven has croaked, the next thing expected of him is that he shall fly away. As I stay, you may take it that I have a better disposition than a raven. Will you tell me if you have any friends other than the woman of this house?"

"Mr. Gerard Crewe is the only intimate friend."

"A young woman can scarcely open her mind to a young man, or ask services of him, and a young man whose gallantry would lead him to do your bidding whether it be good or bad, and whose breeding would silence his tongue when it was necessary to give you unpleasant advice, is not the friend you need. Try me, young lady, and don't be afraid of trying me a good deal." He held out his hand, and Lady Betty willingly gave him hers—feeling as he held it the significance of his grasp. "Now tell me the state of your affairs, and we will try and come to an arrangement for the future. How much money have you?"

"All that was sent to me by the gentleman in Lincoln's Inn."

"And how much do you owe?"

"I do not know—since mamma's death I have had dresses and bonnets, but Mrs. Walker said the tradesfolks could wait for their money."

"I warrant she did. Well, my dear, and did your mother leave any bill's unpaid?"

"Yes, a great many."

"Did she now?" The doctor appeared to be greatly surprised. "But I daresay she gave a bill as well as received one. Do you think it possible that she gave a bill of sale upon her furniture and effects?"

"I received a letter yesterday concerning something of the

kind, but I could not understand it. We didn't learn these matters in our arithmetic at school."

"No, my dear—knowledge of this kind does not come under the head of elegant accomplishments. But it should. Have you the letter?"

"It is in this pocket, I think. Yes—here."

Doctor Blandly read it through every word carefully, and folding it, said:

"This polite note informs you that Mr. M. Moss will be under the painful obligation of taking possession of all your house in Park Lane contains, unless the sum of three hundred pounds is paid by the 25th instant."

"Three hundred pounds! I have not so much."

"No, Miss Betty—no," the Doctor said, putting the letter in his pocket. "I will call upon Mr. M. Moss this afternoon, and see what can be done with him."

"Perhaps he will wait like the other tradesmen."

"I take it that Mr. M. Moss is a Jew; if he is, one cannot rank him with the other tradesmen, for Jews are scrupulously exact in collecting their debts and taking advantage of their opportunities."

"And my other debts!" Lady Betty was aghast as her eyes opened to the realities of her position.

"Collect all the bills you have, my dear, and let me have them. Not now, but when you are packing up your things to leave this house. By the way, will you do me the honour to be my visitor when you are free?"

Already the question, "Where am I to go?" had risen in Lady Betty's mind. This invitation came at the very moment it was needed.

"I shall be very glad to——" She checked herself abruptly, struck by the sudden perception of her dependent position.

"Then that is settled," said the Doctor, briskly. "My house is too large for me. I will have two or three rooms prepared for you, and the sooner you come and take possession of them the better I shall like it."

"Doctor Blandly, I am very grateful for your kindness. I shall accept your advice and seek it without hesitation, and I shall be happy to visit you; but I beg you will not make any preparations, for my stay will be quite short."

Doctor Blandly was astonished by the altered tone in which she spoke—firm and self-reliant—and he looked at her curiously for a moment in silence; then he rose, and with a stiff bow answered:

"Very good, Miss Betty, very good," and taking a final pinch

of snuff, he added to himself, "Proud as Lucifer, for all her misfortunes."

Lady Betty seemed absorbed in thought, and so after a few minutes of unproductive conversation, Doctor Blandly left her, pressing her hand warmly when they parted, and reading the unspoken thoughts in her clear eyes. He was not displeased with what he read there.

But it took Lady Betty longer to find out what had prompted her to refuse Doctor Blandly's hospitality, and to see that she had arrived at the turning-point in her life.

CHAPTER XLV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

LADY BETTY ran with soft, quick steps past the drawing-room, and reached her room without interception, and sat there for half an hour after she had changed her riding-dress for an afternoon gown, with her hands in her lap and her eyes before her. Then she rose briskly and began to rummage her boxes and drawers where her papers were scattered—she was not a very orderly young person—selecting from among them the unpaid bills.

"Mistress is about to drink a dish of tea, and she wishes to know if you will join her as she is quite alone," said a servant at her door.

"Say I will be downstairs almost immediately," replied Lady Betty.

She waited but to close the open drawers and boxes, and then ran down to the drawing-room, folding the collected bills, and putting them away in her pocket.

"My dear Lady Betty, this cruel visit must have quite undone the good effects of your ride. I sympathise with you sincerely. Take this tea, my love, and tell me all about it. You found that dreadful old Doctor quite insupportable, I am sure," said Mrs. Walker.

"On the contrary, I found him very kind and considerate," replied Lady Betty, taking a seat at the table.

"I forgot that his interview was with Lady Betty. It is quite impossible to be unamiable with you, my dear."

Lady Betty inclined her head, and showed no signs of being communicative.

"He came chiefly to offer you his sympathy, I suppose, dear?" said Mrs. Walker, returning undaunted to the charge.

"No, I think his main purpose was to speak about an affair of business. He was my poor mother's agent, as you know. By-the-bye, Felicia, you have some unpaid bills of mine, I think. Could you let me have them?"

"My love, they are in a hundred different places; it would take me a month to find them. You need not be anxious about them, they will be sent in again only too certainly."

"I would look for you, if you could tell me where to search."

"Why are you so eager to have them?"

"I wish to pay them."

"Then I shall certainly not let you have them. Don't look so preposterously grave, dear. The only pressing account is the dressmaker's, and we must pay that, or we shall never get our dresses home in time. There ought to be a law to bind dressmakers to punctuality, then we should not be put to this harassing necessity of paying bills whenever they are presented. She will be here to-morrow with the fashions to measure us for our travelling-dresses, and I will settle your bill at the same time with my own. Don't trouble yourself about the money, when we return from the Wells will suit me, or not at all, if you like it better."

"How good and generous all the world is!" thought Lady Betty, and involuntarily her tongue spoke her thought.

"What have you to be thankful for?—appreciation? That follows as the natural result of your mingling with people of taste. I object to gratitude, 'tis a mean, middle-class sentiment, an acknowledgment of inferiority which is unknown to us. We are equal; we are generous and expect generosity; we accept services as our right. What style of bonnet shall you have for the journey?"

"I shall make my straw do."

"Straw! when nothing but beaver and silk is the rage? Nonsense! You shall not dress out of fashion just because you have a little trouble on your mind. I shall buy you a bonnet I saw this morning: 'tis a charming trifle, and with a mantle to match."

"Don't you think my tippet will answer all purposes, the weather is hot?"

"All the better reason for not dressing lightly. Never be *bourgeois* in your habits. But why should I tell you this, who have always shown such excellent taste and headed the fashions?"

"It is necessary for me to be economical."

"Oh, you are dreadfully, alarmingly shocking! Economical! what a horrid word!"

"Nevertheless, my circumstances oblige me to be saving."

"Another abominable expression, my dear. If at this moment you are pressed for money you must permit me to supply your wants. I have had property left to me, and I know what a long time it takes in passing through the lawyers' hands. I assure you that for six months after my father's demise I suffered unspeakable agonies, and I wished him back a hundred times, for I was at the mercy of his executors."

"I have enough money for my present necessities, thank you, Felicia."

"Then, in that case, you will have a silk bonnet, and whatever is the *bon ton* in dresses."

Lady Betty inclined her head in acquiescence. She had accepted to go to the Wells with Felicia, and she was bound to dress consistently.

Felicia bent forward and kissed her, pleased with her submission.

"When shall we leave London?" asked Lady Betty.

"In three weeks at the furthest; sooner, if our dresses are finished."

"And how long shall we stay there?"

"Until the end of the season. By that time you may reasonably hope to be in legal possession of your poor mother's property. I suppose Doctor Blandly is an executor?"

"No. My mother made no will. Poor soul! she had nothing to leave me."

"Nothing to leave you, Lady Betty! Why she was constantly talking about—"

"She made a very unfortunate speculation shortly before her death, which has resulted since in the loss of all she possessed."

"But she settled something upon you, surely?"

"Not a penny, it was not in her power to do so."

"You have not whispered a word of this to me hitherto."

"I was ignorant myself until Doctor Blandly told me this afternoon."

"And you heard him without going into convulsions? you did not even faint away? and you can sit there and talk about it as calmly as if nothing had happened? Oh, I cannot believe it!"

"It is quite true."

"But you have some resource; Doctor Blandly, perhaps, has promised you assistance?"

"I have no resource, in the sense you mean, and I cannot accept assistance from a gentleman unrelated to me by any ties of kindred or family friendship."

"That is an excellent reason for not offering assistance, but none for refusing it. One hears every day of persons making donations to perfect strangers, but I never yet heard of them being refused."

"I am not in a position to receive charity," said Lady Betty, rather sharply.

A proverb about beggars on horseback crossed Mrs. Walker's mind, but as she looked at her friend's young face and graceful figure, she was yet inclined to be hopeful, so she kept the reflection to herself, and said :

"'Tis a mercy you have good looks; with them and a little *finerse* you may manage to find a wealthy husband before the end of the season."

"Oh, Felicia! how can you for a moment think I could descend to such a baseness?"

"I see nothing base in marrying a wealthy husband." Mrs. Walker had married an old man for no better motive than the prospect of inheriting his riches. "It seems to me, Lady Betty, that poverty has exalted your sentiments to a prodigious extent, which is unfortunate, since, if there is one thing more than another that the poor cannot afford, and ought to get rid of, 'tis pride."

"On the contrary, I think 'tis the one thing they must retain to deserve respect."

Lady Betty spoke with warmth, and would probably have said much more, but that she was checked by the remembrance of Felicia's previous kindness, and a suspicion that she did not mean what she said.

"Then what on earth do you intend doing?"

"I have not yet had time to determine. Come, Felicia, be your natural self. We are alone, and worldliness is a mask that you put on to suit the cynical humour which is in fashion. Forget that you are Mrs. Walker, and advise me as Felicia."

"I have given my advice, and been accused of suggesting baseness," responded Felicia coldly.

"You spoke under irritation."

"Not at all. I shall be glad to alter my views if you can show better. Tell me your ideas, and I shall be happy to assist you——"

"I know you will, Felicia."

"With any suggestions that may occur to me," Mrs. Walker said, concluding her broken sentence.

"In the first place the furniture and china in Park Lane will have to be sold."

"Sell your furniture! Why all the world would know it in twenty-four hours, and what excuse can you make?"

"The necessity of paying my mother's debts and my own."

If Lady Betty had proposed escaping her creditors by means of the Messieurs Mongolfier's balloon, the notion would not have appeared more preposterous or wildly suicidal to Mrs. Walker.

"Go on, my love," she said, with forced calmness.

"I do not know how much I shall realise by the sale, and I cannot tell the extent of my debts, but I think I shall have more than a hundred pounds when all is settled. I must try and get the matter arranged before I leave London."

"A hundred pounds, and rent and living at the Wells so expensive. Why, after your dress and journey are paid for, you won't have enough to keep you there six weeks."

Lady Betty had understood that she was to be Felicia's guest during their stay at the waters. She was not displeased to find herself in error; the necessity of keeping up a false position was obviated.

"Then I had better not go," she said, quietly.

"I am entirely of your opinion. If you absolutely insist upon this sale taking place at once you would find it impossible to attend the assemblies, no one would acknowledge you."

The announcement of a visitor put an end to the conversation, much to the satisfaction of both. Lady Betty retired to her room to shed a few tears over the defection of her friend, and make plans for immediate action; while she was still in cogitation a maid brought a packet and placed it in her hands with her mistress's compliments. The packet contained the tradespeople's bills, which Mrs. Walker had not calculated upon finding in less than a month's search.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GERARD TALBOT.

DOCTOR BLANDLY sought Gerard. Leaving Lincoln's Inn he stepped into a hackney coach and instructed the driver to carry him to Brooks', in St. James's Street, that being, as he took it, the most likely place in which to find him.

"Mr. Crewe isn't here, Sir," said the hall-keeper; "think he must have left town, Sir."

"That is not likely, my good man," replied Doctor Blandly, "for he was yesterday in Lincoln's Inn."

"Indeed, Sir, that's particularly odd, Sir, for he wasn't here last night, nor hasn't been for ten days, and a mortal number of members has been asking after him."

"I suppose a gentleman may be in London without of necessity coming to this house?"

"Some gentleman may, Sir, but Mr. Crewe is one of them as can't. I've never known him to stay away two nights running—except when the season's done."

Doctor Blandly returned to his coach and gave the address at which he had met Gerard a fortnight before.

"Is Mr. Gerard Crewe at home?" he asked of the servant who opened the door.

The servant fetched a card from the drawer of a table in the passage, and putting it in the Doctor's hands, said:

"Left here a fortnight last Saturday. That is his new address."

Once more Doctor Blandly returned to his coach, and, reading the card, told the man to drive him to Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Stopping before the number indicated, the Doctor looked several times from the house to the card in his hand before he could feel sure that no mistake had been made. The place was dingy and poor, as unlike Gerard's previous dwelling-place as possible.

In answer to his hesitating knock a slatternly girl opened the door, and replying to his inquiry told him to walk up to the second floor, where he would find Mr. Crewe, and warned him to be careful he didn't fall over the breakfast-tray outside the first floor's door.

"The luck has turned," said the Doctor, as he ascended the steep and narrow stairs.

He knocked; Gerard called "Come in;" the Doctor opened the door and stood for a minute unobserved, taking in all that met his eye. It was a small room, one quarter occupied by a four post bedstead, with two strips of carpet upon the floor. The furniture consisted of three rush-bottomed chairs, a wash-stand, a chest of drawers, a hanging shelf of books, and a table. The window was open. On the sill stood a long ale glass, with a couple of clove-pinks in it—the only gracious thing there. The table was set before the window, and Gerard sat at it, with his back to the door. His chin rested on his left hand; his elbow on the table; in his right hand was a pen; on the table, and at his feet, paper.

Doctor Blandly drew out his snuff-box mechanically, and tapped it, keeping his eye on the figure before him. At the sound Gerard turned.

"I beg your pardon, Doctor Blandly," he said, rising; "I thought it was my man—I should say, the maid of the house. Be seated, Sir."

He placed a chair to face the window with a nervous glance round the room. Doctor Blandly sat down and slowly took his pinch of snuff.

"Do you snuff, Mr. Talbot?" he asked, extending the box.

A faint flush of colour passed over Gerard's face in being addressed by his father's name.

"Occasionally," he answered, taking from the proffered box and bowing.

"'Tis a boon not to be neglected, Sir. It refreshes the senses and invigorates the mind."

"Is that a recognised fact?" Gerard asked with more anxiety in his tone than the subject seemed to demand.

"It is, Sir—amongst snuff-takers. Perhaps for a young man fresh air and exercise are as effective. Clove-pinks—and very good clove-pinks too," said the Doctor, looking at the flowers, then taking the glass in his hand and examining them more closely, he added—"for London. You are fond of flowers, Sir."

"Who is not?"

"A great many people. People without hearts don't care for them, though let me tell you that your father did not care for them, albeit he had a heart as tender as a child's. By living so long on the sea he relished no colour but blue, and no savour but pitch and saltpetre." The Doctor smelt at the flowers, and said in a tone of encouraging admiration, "Very good clove-pinks. I would have you come and see some that I grow at Edmonton. They smell sweetest of evenings and early morning; you would give me great pleasure, Sir, to visit me and eat of a fine haunch of mutton that I stuck a skewer into at my butcher's this morning. I shall have it cooked on Sunday, if the day will suit you."

"The pleasure will be mine," said Gerard.

"Pleasures are best when shared, Sir. Very good clove-pinks, indeed. Will you put them back in their place? Thank you. You have an agreeable view of the river from this window."

"It compensates the luxuries that you see I possess no longer—or it should. I own I find it difficult at times to reconcile myself to poverty."

"It is hard indeed to change at once the habits that have slowly grown upon us—'tis like the transplanting of a shrub whose roots and fibres have had time to permeate the surround-

ing soil; for awhile it droops and languishes, its bruised fibres lacking the power to assimilate the strengthening juices of the earth; but anon, Sir, you shall find it strike out with lusty vigour, and flourish with a new and stronger life—especially if the soil be richer.”

“Some plants will not bear transplanting, I believe, Doctor.”

“’Tis true, Sir, but there are, thank God, not many such of English growth—few indeed, so sappy or so sapless that they will not thrive the better by discreet removal to purer and more wholesome conditions of existence.”

“Shall I be wrong in taking the personal application of your remarks to myself?”

“Certainly not, if the conclusions I draw from what I see are correct.”

“May I ask you to tell me what those conclusions are?”

“You have turned your back on the gaming-house, and intend never to return to it—as a gamester.”

Gerard listened gravely, and in silence fetched a chair and seated himself by the table opposite his visitor. He looked out upon the river dreamily, and at length, ending his meditation with a sigh, turned to Doctor Blandly, and said:

“I am afraid you give me credit for more virtue than I have, Doctor. You do not know that I left the table of necessity.”

“You owe nothing, surely.”

“No; but my ability to gain is gone.”

“You cannot believe in luck to such an extent.”

“I never trusted to chance at all. ’Twas that which made me successful. Whilst others were alternately elated and depressed, my temper never varied, and the advantage on my side were enormous. I do not think I am cold by nature—”

“I am sure you are not,” interpellated Doctor Blandly.

“But the circumstances of my life—above all the absence of hope, chilled my blood. I saw nothing in the world to wish for but its luxuries—things that could be bought with money. I knew no friends, no relatives save the villainous foot-pad who called himself my brother, and I owed my position to anonymous charity. With these trammels I could not hope to rise to any state better than that I held. I satisfied my conscience by punctilious honesty in my dealings at the table, and my only ambition by paying back all I had received from you.”

“And I wish with all my heart you had kept it.”

“Had I never met my brother Tom, I should still be a gamester; but the faculty of centring my whole thought upon the cards, of maintaining a perfect equanimity under all conditions

was weakened on the day he first gave me his hand in friendship; it was destroyed the moment you told me of our relationship. The old fetters were removed, and a new field of hopes and aspirations was opened to me. An intense desire to win a sum of money that would enable me to leave the gaming-table, and learn a profession, seized me and——"

"You lost," said Doctor Blandly, completing the sentence which Gerard had terminated with a shrug. "And a very good job too, Sir. Let me tell you I should be very sorry to see dice on a field vert quartered in the Talbot coat. I should have been better pleased to hear that you relinquished gaming for the honour of your father's name."

"I am a faulty man and not a hero of romance, Doctor Blandly."

"True, Sir, true. The only difference between you is that you avow the truth, where t'other would be careful to conceal it, and so I give you the preference and my hand, if you will take it."

Gerard gave his hand quickly, and the Doctor grasped it, and held it for a full minute. The wrinkling of his brows showed that his thoughts were busy.

"And so you think of entering a profession with a view to gaining money," he said.

"I am making my first attempt," replied Gerard, with a motion of his hand towards the paper on the table.

"Letters—you have chosen a profession that requires no tedious apprenticeship, like the law or physic. All that you require is patience, a pot of ink—and genius."

"I have the pot of ink," said Gerard, with a laugh.

"And what branch of writing do you affect, Sir?"

"I have begun a comedy."

"I am told it is difficult to get a comedy read."

"I have friends at both houses, and Mr. Kemble has promised me assistance."

"Your mother had excellent dramatic talent, poor soul! A work of this kind should of necessity take a long time to complete, Mr. Talbot."

"I am making but slow progress at present."

Gerard gave a rueful glance at the scattered sheets of erased work, and the few approved lines.

"Do not hurry it, Sir, for the sake of the remuneration you will get by its production. Nature sets us the example of working slowly; nothing that is to last can be done quickly. If you want money I will lend it to you, and you can give no better proof of your friendship than by accepting my service."

"I shall not hesitate to ask you for a loan when I actually need it, Doctor."

"Unfortunately, 'tis the only kind of assistance I can render you, for I lack the imaginative faculty, and I do not profess to have the critical acumen. In physic I might have served you better, but before a fine picture or a good comedy I can only hold up my hands in astonishment and admiration, wondering how the work was done."

"Nevertheless, your opinion and advice would be of service to me. I protest I do not know whether my work is good or bad. I write and re-write again and again, and in the end cannot tell whether the first expression of my thought is better or worse than the last."

"'Tis the diffidence of merit. Only a fool is satisfied with his work, and for him improvement is impossible. When I was a young man, a friend of mine took his first work to Doctor Johnson, and asked him to point out any faults he could find in it. 'Sir,' says Doctor Johnson, 'twill save time to clap the tract on the fire at once, for if you cannot find out the faults for yourself, 'tis because the parts are all faulty alike.'"

"Put your manuscript in your pocket and bring it with you on Sunday, Mr. Talbot. You shall read it to me, and have my honest opinion on its merits. I shall judge, not as a critic who hopes to find fault for the exercise of his malicious wit, but as one who takes his place in the pit hoping to be amused."

"I wish I had only your judgment to fear. Unfortunately 'tis the critic and not the audience who decides the fate of a play."

"Well, Sir, you shall have both. I have a friend in holy orders who shall join us at dinner. He is a man of reading, and preaches excellent sermons, so I am told; I have contracted a vicious habit of sleeping after the Psalms, which prevents me from judging for myself. And now to turn to a sadder subject." The Doctor took a pinch of snuff and then said: "You were at Lincoln's Inn yesterday, I hear."

"No news of my poor brother Tom had been heard?"

"None. I was there this morning, and, as you may suppose by my silence, nothing has been heard since your visit respecting your brother Tom. As regards Barnabas Crewe; hitherto he has been represented by a Newgate pettifogger, yesterday he made his appearance at Talbot Hall in person, with his lawyer and half-a-dozen sturdy rogues, who overcame the resistance of the steward and servants, entered the Hall, and there they stay until it is proved that Theophilus Talbot is not the

heir. The news was sent this morning by Blake, the steward, who still occupies the lodge and waits for instructions."

"Barnabas must not be allowed to stay there."

"Not a day, Sir, when we can find the means of turning him out. Possession is nine points of the law with such a scoundrel as that, and he has a cunning rascal for a lawyer, who, I am afraid, is more than a match for us. He has evidence on his side which we could not overthrow. I might swear that he is Barnabas Crewe until I am black in the face, but at the same time, I must acknowledge that he is identical with the child entered in the parish register as Theophilus Talbot. We have not a single proof that your mother was *enveinte* at the time of her marriage; there is no proof but my words that your father disowned the child. I have only your mother's last words and my own conviction that she was true to your father after her marriage, and that you were his legitimate offspring, which would go for nothing in a court of law. Barnabas is to all effect your brother Tom's heir-at-law."

"Is it impossible to find anyone who knew my mother at the time of her marriage?"

"Your father removed her from her friends in London, thirty years, or nearly thirty years, since. What possibility is there?"

"But little indeed; and yet, from whom did Barnabas get his information? Not from me, certainly, not from you. How could he know the facts which his lawyer has produced except by communicating with one who was intimately acquainted with my father or mother. Depend upon it there is a third person whose existence we have ignored."

The Doctor buried his chin in his hand.

"I can think of no one but his own father," he said, raising his head. "They may have been thrown together by accident; but we could expect no assistance from him, since his own interest would lead him to support his son's claim."

"That makes the case more desperate. Are we to suffer my father's estate to fall into the hands of these two scoundrels? Would not their very looks convict them if they stood before a judge?"

"Not if blushes were needed as a proof of guilt. I am strongly opposed to making this misfortune public, though if you wish it I will give you all the support in my power. In the first place, it could not result in benefit to you."

"You do not think I have any motive but the honour of my family?"

"No, and that is a reason for avoiding publicity. If you

failed to prove your case, Barnabas would be recognised as legitimate, and the line of the Talbots would include a wretch whom we know to be a highwayman, whom I suspect to be a murderer."

"Great Heavens! do you suspect him of murdering Tom?"

"Who else could have so strong a motive, if, as we suppose, he knew beforehand of the relationship between them?"

"You think that Barnabas murdered Tom?" asked Gerard, coldly.

"I do," the Doctor replied, thinking only of the evidence.

The blood rushed into Gerard's face, and he dropped his face into his hands.

"My mother's son," he said, with a groan.

"What have I said?" the Doctor cried, springing to his feet.

"Pardon me, my boy. I can think of you only as Tom's brother. Don't take my words to heart. 'Twas an idle suspicion that escaped me in an unguarded moment."

"No idle suspicion," Gerard said, dropping his hands between his knees, without raising his head. "'Tis a fact which I should have suspected, but that the crime was too horrible to attribute to my brother. Barnabas a murderer—'twas shame enough to know him as a thief. *My* brother a murderer—'tis an encouraging reflection to begin the new life with—a passport to decent society—an advantage which critics would not fail to mention amongst the merits of my work—a charm to win the affections of a cultured girl."

"And a stimulant to courage, Gerard," added the Doctor. "So that you are free from blame, why should you heed prejudice. Your father was best pleased when the sea was crowded with enemies, for there was the greatest prospect of glory for his King. Let your conscience be your king; fight a good fight for its honour, and never fear what may happen. The good opinion of four honest men—nay, your own satisfaction alone—outweighs a thousand times the flattery of a crowd of fools."

"Can we do nothing to free my father's name from the disgrace that this scoundrel throws upon it? If he got into the Hall with the aid of a dozen men, can't we turn him out with the aid of a dozen more?"

"A useless game of Crambo that we should lose by. No. Take my advice—leave him alone. His own actions will prove to all thinking people that he is not your father's son, but a rascally impostor. He will be shunned by everyone; and his life at Talbot Hall will not be too cheerful, I engage. I have a flea for his ear that will make him heartily repent his

knavery. I am heartily mistaken if before the end of twelve months he does not offer to make a public renunciation of his rights for a few hundred pounds down."

"What power have you? He has the Hall."

"And I have the money." The Doctor took out his snuff-box, and gave it a tap of satisfaction. "And rather than let a penny of it go into his hands, I'll squander it all in the Court of Chancery. He can't pay his expenses, and his lawyer will not undertake a game at which he must, in the end, lose. He may kill a few head of deer, and shoot as much game as he likes—let him. There will still be enough for us to celebrate his departure when his time comes. He may empty the cellar and probably will in a few weeks—let him, again I say. Thank heaven there's a cave full of port and Burgundy that is known to no one but me—now that poor Tom's gone. As for the rents of the property, my man in Lincoln's Inn will get an injunction to stop him from receiving a mite. He shan't cut a single one of those blessed old oaks in the park. Without money he will get no one to serve him; without wine he will get no one, not even his fellow rogues, to visit him. He won't be able to get powder and shot to kill his own game—take a pinch, Mr. Talbot—and if he can sleep alone in that empty Hall, with no liquor to stupefy his senses, he is not the man I take him to be. Twelve months—why I won't give him six months lease of his ill-gotten home. We shall have him whining at our feet for mercy and pardon before Christmas is upon us, Sir."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE TAMING OF MRS. BAXTER.

"Park Lane, August 1, 1800.

"DEAR Doctor Blandly,

"I should be wanting in due appreciation of your kindness if I failed to ask your guidance through the difficulty which besets me at the present moment. With the permission of Mrs. Walker, I have abandoned my intention of spending a season at the Wells, and I wish to arrange my pecuniary affairs, and enter upon those duties which my altered position necessitates at once. I have collected my dear mother's bills, and find that my liabilities amount to the sum of four hundred and seventy pounds seventeen shillings; this with the sum owing to Mr. Moss reaches a total of seven hundred and seventy

pounds seventeen shillings. I have in my purse nearly one hundred and ninety-seven pounds, and that with the proceeds arising from the sale of the furniture, &c., in the house will be, I hope, more than sufficient to pay all I owe, including the rent of the house.

"But I do not know any gentleman in the auctioneering trade, and so I ask you to tell me what course I shall take for the disposal of the china and things. I have had everything well brushed and polished, and save my clothes and a work-box which was poor dear mamma's, all packed in two trunks, and an elbow-chair which is set aside in the garret, everything is ready to be sold, and may be seen by applying to me, or to the person in charge of the house if I am absent.

"With sincere gratitude for your goodness to me and my poor mother,

"I am, dear Doctor Blandly,

"Obediently yours,

"ELIZABETH ST. CYR."

Doctor Blandly read this letter, which he found beside the "Times" newspaper on his table when he came in from making the tour of his garden, which was his custom, in fair or foul weather, before sitting down to his breakfast.

"A very good letter and well writ," he said holding the sheet at arm's length, and looking at the even lines and bold characters with a kindly critical eye. "Neatly folded, well expressed and every line of it the unstudied product of a clear and healthy mind—so I take it." He read it again, commenting as he went. "Beset with difficulties—aye, aye, you have need of a pilot, poor child—thrown like a frail skiff into the hurrying current of the work-a-day world, where be abundance of hard rocks and few placid pools! . . . So Mrs. Walker has permitted you to go your own way. One understands that. 'Tis well for you, Miss Betty, though I wager your heart ached to find her so fickle a friend . . . Duties—duties? Ha, yes, the duty of living frugally upon her slender means. . . . She's more anxious to discharge her debts than to make a profit for herself—a good girl. . . . Don't know any gentleman in the auctioneering trade—no, nor I, my dear; nevertheless we must content ourselves with such as we have. . . . Two trunks and an elbow-chair set aside in the garret—a chair too old to sell perhaps; and is that all the furniture she reserves for her new home. Everything ready to be sold—that means much—the selling of all that is dear by usage and familiarity, yet not a word of the pain it costs to part with them. I can fancy the

child polishing those trifles for the last time, and bravely staunching her tears the while. "Tis a brave girl—and her brief, clear letter is more touching than if it were filled with regrets and blotted with tears—a good, brave girl."

Doctor Blandly laid down the letter and took up the "Times," as if to divert his thoughts from the subject until he could think of it with less emotion. As his eyes wandered down the columns of the paper they fell upon this advertisement:

"A Young Lady desires an engagement in a family or school, to teach young children.—Address, Miss St. Cyr, Park Lane, London."

"What," he cried, "she is prepared to work for a livelihood, and submit to the tyranny of a jealous mother, or a grasping school-mistress, for a pittance scarcely sufficient to buy clothes to her back, rather than accept my protection and help! By George, she's a trump of a girl!"

He sat in cogitation for some time, looking now at the letter and then at the advertisement, and again at his slowly twiddling thumbs. Finally he rose from his seat and rang the bell.

"Bring me my Sunday coat and shoes, Jerry," said he, when the old servant appeared.

"Your Sunday coat and shoes, or your fishing coat and shoes, Sir?"

"Do I look as if I were going a-fishing?"

Jerry looked in his master's face, and finding not a particle of pleasure in its expression, withdrew without asking for further confirmation.

Doctor Blandly walked over to the Vicarage.

A pastor in a garden, surrounded by his children, ought to be a subject worthy of a painter, but the Reverend John Baxter, under similar conditions, was a subject deserving rather the practical sympathy of the philanthropist. Jane, his youngest daughter, was cutting her teeth, and had to be nursed; little Anne was quietly making herself ill, and staining her clean bib, with mulberries; and the two boys, in open rebellion against their father, refused to study their primer, and dodged him among the gooseberry bushes when he sought to bring them to obedience. The weather was sultry, the Reverend John Baxter was stout, and more than once in his pursuit the straggling branches of the prickly gooseberry laid hold of his ungartered legs, causing him to stumble violently, to the mortal jeopardy of the screaming babe in his arms. It was just as he had relinquished the chase for a minute to go and tear little Anne away from the mulberries that he caught sight of Doctor

Blandly on the other side of the privet hedge, making his way towards the vicarage.

Abandoning his child in the greater danger which awaited his friend, Mr. Baxter moved towards the privet hedge to warn his friend off, but Doctor Blandly was already in the garden, and close to the door of the house. In vain he waved his arm as a signal to retreat, and shaped with his mouth the words, "Don't; for the love of heaven, don't! *She's at home!*" The Doctor was deep in thought, and never averted his eye from the path before him until he had knocked at the door of the Vicarage.

Mrs. Baxter herself opened the door. She had a pen in her hand, and a tart expression on her face.

"You have come to see Mr. Baxter, I presume," said the lady, frigidly.

"No, madam, I have come to see you. If you can give me five minutes' attention I will explain my business."

"Business! Baxter has not told me a word of it."

"Baxter did not know, madam: so 'twas not his fault that you did not know, nor yours neither," he added, in an undertone.

Mrs. Baxter led the Doctor into a grim chamber, where a number of parochial books and papers showed that she was managing her husband's business.

Doctor Blandly seated himself on an angular, narrow chair, with a slipping horse-hair seat, and came to the point without waste of time.

"Mrs. Baxter," said he, "I hear you have lost your governess."

"I sent her away at a minute's notice for impertinence."

"Poor soul!"

"Oh, of course, you pity *her*, Doctor Blandly."

"On the contrary, ma'am, 'tis you that I pity. The young woman has, in all probability, found another engagement more suitable to her disposition, whereas you are still without a governess for your children, which must of necessity give you less time to devote to your husband's affairs. Will you be good enough to look at this advertisement, which I have cut from the 'Times' newspaper of this morning."

Mrs. Baxter took the cutting, and drawing down the corners of her thin lips in anticipation, read it through.

"I see nothing attractive in *that*," she remarked; "a *young lady* wishes for an engagement. Governesses are coming to something indeed! *Young person* would have been more respectful. Not a word about accomplishments."

"She possibly thought it unnecessary to talk of accomplishments, as she wishes to teach young children."

"Ah, that again—her wish to teach young children is an evidence of incapacity."

"Had she advertised to teach elder children, I should not have thought it worth while to show you the advertisement."

"Miss St. Cyr. I should have thought initials, or her christian name alone, more appropriate. She does not mention the name of her mistress, which is, in my opinion, a flagrant outrage upon propriety, as the lady lives in Park Lane."

"Miss St. Cyr has no mistress, and the address given is her own house."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. She is an orphan, and the whole of her fortune was lost through an unfortunate investment which I made with her mother's capital shortly before her death, which happened in May last."

"I have not heard a word of this from Baxter."

"For certain reasons, madam, I do not tell Baxter all that I do and know."

Mrs. Baxter read the advertisement again, and her lips instead of being drawn down towards her chin, were now stretched back in a horizontal line towards her ears.

"Her modesty is certainly becoming," she said, "and 'twould be a great advantage for Samuel and Luke to be instructed by a refined young lady. Under their father's training they have grown so violent that I find it difficult myself to command respect. Little Anne can walk alone, and 'tis high time she learnt a hymn, and Jane is very fractious of nights."

"If you read the advertisement again, you will see that Miss St. Cyr does not undertake to do the work of a nurse."

Mrs. Baxter drew up her mobile lips into the resemblance of a bladder-neck at this reminder, and then shaking her head said:

"I do not as a rule employ unfortunate people: they are generally undeserving, and frequently expect indulgence, instead of showing that active anxiety to give satisfaction which their humbled condition should prompt. Still, they are more ready to accept moderate terms of remuneration than people of greater experience."

"As concerns remuneration, Mrs. Baxter, I have a suggestion to make, which I hope will not be unacceptable. I wish you to give Miss St. Cyr whatever terms she asks without abatement, and in addition, I wish her to be provided with all the comforts you would offer her were the young lady merely a guest in

your house. If a nursemaid to soothe the temper of your infant will make the house more agreeable as a home to the young lady, by all means engage a nursemaid. Whatever expenses these alterations in your establishment may oblige, I will discharge, on the condition that the financial arrangement shall be absolutely a secret between you and me."

"Oh, of course, Doctor Blandly. But I really do not know how to——" Mrs. Baxter hesitated, but a greedy hungriness overspread her face, and showed that she was well-disposed to receive the Doctor's proposal.

"You shall reckon up your expenses at the end of each week or month as you choose, and I will pay them *without asking any questions*."

Mrs. Baxter's stony eyes fell, and she stroked her nose with the end of her pen in some confusion; but the prize was too good to be sacrificed to modesty.

"If 'tis an act of charity, Doctor——"

"No 'tis no charity, but simply a very poor restitution on my part."

"In that case I need not hesitate. I will write at once, though I'm afraid I have nothing but business paper. I promise the young lady shall be treated with all due consideration and attention."

"Very well, madam," said Doctor Blandly, rising; "and so long as she is satisfied to stay with you, I will provide funds."

With a few more words Doctor Blandly closed the interview, and then left the Vicarage. Mrs. Baxter at once wrote a note requesting the pleasure of an interview with Miss St. Cyr, at her "earliest convenience," and despatched the sexton on the Reverend John Baxter's cob, with instructions to give the note into Miss St. Cyr's own hand. Doctor Blandly also wrote to Lady Betty, expressing his approval of the determination she had come to, and informing her that his lawyer in Lincoln's Inn would wait upon her, and make all necessary arrangements for the sale of her furniture, and the payment of her debts.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LADY BETTY'S VISIT.

ON the Monday following, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Lady Betty stood at the gate of Dr. Blandly's garden. Jerry had instructions to admit without delay a young

lady dressed in black, whenever she came, and to treat her with as much respect as if she were a gentleman; so he answered her question with a low bow, saying in his most polite tones, that Doctor Blandly was at home, and begged her to follow him.

Lady Betty passed through the wicket by the side of the house, and coming upon a full view of the garden, which was ablaze with free growing annuals, geraniums, fuchsias and hollyhocks, she stopped for a moment while her being seemed to expand as she imbibed the delicious colour and fragrance around her. It was the first time she had stood in a garden since the pleasant days at Winchmore, nearly a year ago. Her heart wept and smiled, as happy memories and sad passed through her mind.

"Oh, if I could only hope," she sighed, "or if I might lay aside my mourning clothes, and wear light muslin, and sit in the shade watching the bees, and feasting my senses like them, without regret—with nothing but lazy indifference!"

"If you please, miss," said Jerry, coming back to her side across the lawn, treading the gravel on the points of his toes, and speaking in a whisper, "master is asleep." He pointed over the flower-beds to the apple-tree in the middle of the lawn, under which the Doctor sat.

"I will walk about the garden until he wakes," said Lady Betty.

"Thank you, miss; the weather's so hot, and he do like his doze after lunch to that extent, that I can't abear to wake him. Can I bring you anything, miss? A bottle of claret, now—the port I shouldn't recommend before dinner."

"No, thank you. If I want refreshment I will find some fruit."

Jerry scratched his ear, and said with more hesitation—

"Master wouldn't begrudge the best wine there is in the cellar, but he's that perticular about his wall-fruit, that I daren't so much as pick up a dropped plum when it's green."

"I will spare the wall-fruit," Lady Betty said, smiling.

With many thanks for her consideration, and as many bows, old Jerry retired to the cellar, where he had bottling on hand; and Lady Betty, taking the shady path, walked slowly down the garden, stooping now and then to pick the flowers which were her favourites. After awhile she crossed the lawn to the apple-tree, and sat upon the seat which surrounded it. Doctor Blandly was not upon this seat, but comfortably settled in his cushioned Windsor-chair. He wore a pair of nankeen-breeches, thin stockings, and a coat and waistcoat of white jean; his

head and face were veiled with the yellow India handkerchief. His feet were crossed, and his hands were folded in his lap: a table was at his right hand, on which were disposed an ale glass, a long clay pipe, a pruning knife, and a volume of Cowper's poems. These things told the character of the man.

Lady Betty sat arranging the flowers she had gathered, content with her occupation and an occasional look at the blue sky through the foliage of the apple-tree, and the coloured beds that skirted the lawn. Presently the doctor drew a long breath, knitted his finger-tips and slowly twiddled his thumbs. Then in a low voice he sang:

"This little old 'oman, so I've heered tell,
She went to market her eggs for to sell
Singing, tol de rol, de rol, and a hi tol de rol."

Lady Betty gave the softest "ahem!" Doctor Blandly pulled down his handkerchief.

"Bless my soul, Miss Betty!" he cried, catching sight of the young lady before him, who, with a little smile on her pretty pale face, and her head on one side, was regarding the bouquet she had made. "Why didn't that fool of a Jerry wake me?"

"Because he is a good servant, and fond of his master. I have not been here long, and not a moment has seemed too long."

"You are tired with your journey. Dear heart! to think I should be asleep! Jerry!"

"I am not at all tired. I have only walked from the Vicarage, where Mrs. Baxter insisted upon my taking lunch."

"The Vicarage!" exclaimed Doctor Blandly, with feigned surprise, at the same time stooping to pick up his straw hat and conceal the expression on his face. "Now what on earth could have taken you there?"

"Mrs. Baxter saw an advertisement I had printed in the 'Times' newspaper, and she wrote to me on Friday to engage me as a governess for her children."

"Lord, ah! Baxter said something about his wife losing her governess, now I come to think of it. But what a strange coincidence that she should write to you. I give you my word I never mentioned your name to *him*. Well, my dear, I hope you have accepted the engagement, for then you will have one friend to come to see now and then."

"I have accepted, and I think I shall begin the new life on Saturday next."

"I'm downright glad to hear it. Mrs. Baxter and I don't

get on well together, but that is an advantage in one respect; when you want to escape from her you can come here without fear of being followed. Baxter's a good, soft, stupid old soul, you'll like him." He took his pruning-knife, and rising from his chair, said, with a look of much promise, "Come with me, my dear." He gave her his hand to rise, and held it in his as they walked slowly over the lawn towards the sunny wall.

"You're a brave girl," he said to her, in a low, emphatic tone, "a good brave girl! Your sorrows have come early, but if we must love and lose, 'tis better to suffer while the heart is young and vigorous. Buds nipped in the spring are not missed in the summer, but nothing replaces the autumn loss, and the old stock may not bear another bloom."

Lady Betty glanced at the Doctor's face, and her eyes filled with tears, not for herself, but for him. The tone of his voice, the far-away look in his face, told her that it was not a mere sentimental generality he had uttered, but the summary of his own experience. She held his hand a little tighter, and did not break the reverie into which he seemed to have fallen. She would have been content to walk in silence for an indefinite time, united by hand and heart in a bond of sympathy, but they came face to face with the peaches, and Doctor Blandly's thoughts returned from the past to the present, from the passion that was dead to the love that lived.

"There's a jolly fellow!" said he, turning back a leaf to expose a velvety fruit; "but he will be better to cut to-morrow about eleven, another afternoon's sun, and the mellowing influence of the night air, is wanted to make him perfect. Now down here there's a chap that I ought to have culled this morning, but I couldn't, he looked so comfortable and happy." He led the way down the path, still holding Lady Betty by the hand, towards the "chap" in question: but he stopped to gently lift a peach from the naked brick to the tenderer surface of a leaf, saying as he did so: "Ha! ha! my boy! you will rub your cheek against that wall, will you?"

When they came to the ripe favourite, he paused for a minute or two to point out its excellent points to Lady Betty, and then planting one foot on the path and the other across the bed against the wall, he opened his knife and cut it from the stem with as much care as if the life of the tree were at stake. He placed the fruit in Lady Betty's hand, and went on to gather another and another until he had collected six, and with these they returned to the shadow of the apple-tree. At the same moment Jerry came from the house with a bottle and glasses.

"I've come upon a bottle of the green-waxed Madeiry, master," said he.

"Do you like Madeira, Miss Betty, or do you prefer the red wine?" asked the Doctor.

Lady Betty expressed her satisfaction with Madeira, and the Doctor poured out the wine, after carefully examining the condition of the glasses.

"Perhaps the young lady would like a little Burgundy in about twenty minutes," suggested Jerry.

"When we want more I will call you, Jerry," said the Doctor, and then added in an undertone: "Tell your wife to come and present her duty presently, and, Jerry," as that servant was withdrawing with comprehensive winks, "put about half a shovelful of manure down against the roots of that crinkley peach at once."

Lady Betty found the fruit worthy of all Doctor Blandly had said in its commendation, but could with difficulty convince him that two were sufficient to satisfy her appetite. That she might not lose any particle of the flavour by other considerations, the Doctor limited his conversation to peaches during the feast, and the stock of his comment upon that fruit was yet unexhausted when Jerry's wife, a neat spare woman of fifty or thereabouts, in her best cap and a clean apron, came down to the apple-tree to present her duty.

"Miss Betty," said Doctor Blandly, "this is Kate, Jerry's wife. Kate, this is Miss Betty St. Cyr, of whom I have spoken."

"You will find me most obedient and dutiful, Miss," said Kate, with a bob.

"And now, my dear, if you will follow Kate, she will show you your room, and get you anything you lack."

"Thank you, Doctor Blandly, I cannot stay."

"Not stay, my dear!" exclaimed the Doctor, with dejection. "There's a cold haunch of mutton that's as short as venison, that with a pickled walnut——"

"And the damson pie made a purpose," added Kate. Lady Betty opened her eyes.

"The fact is," said the Doctor, in confusion. "I had a sort of impression, a kind of prediction that you would come to-day. You promised to visit me you know."

"I am, indeed, sorry that I cannot stay. I have fixed six o'clock this evening for an interview at my house with the lawyer."

"Well, my dear—business must be minded, but I am disappointed. However, you are to be my neighbour, and oppor-

tunities will not be wanting of tasting Kate's excellent pies. Kate, you can go."

Kate made a bob, and with a few "dootiful words," retired.

"Shall you return by the coach?" asked Doctor Blandly.

"Yes—if I can find a place."

"Jerry shall secure that for you. There is a coach leaves the 'Angel' at four, which will set you down at Hyde Park Corner. Had I been sure of your coming and suspected that you would leave so soon, I would certainly have retained a friend of yours who left me this morning, to accompany you."

"A friend of mine?"

"Gerard." The Doctor watched the expression of Lady Betty's face to see what effect the name made upon her. Her cheek remained untinged with colour.

"Mr. Crewe?"

"No, not Mr. Crewe—but your friend, Gerard still. When did you see him last?"

"He came to take me for a drive on Thursday, in his Clarence."

"In *his* Clarence?"

"I am not sure that it was his. It was certainly not the one he usually uses—but he keeps a Clarence. Does that surprise you?"

The Doctor drew a long breath; then he smacked his thigh, and giving his head a toss, cried:

"Well done, Gerard! You young people have the courage of the—hum! of St. George himself. Poor boy—so he took you for a drive in a Clarence! And I'll be bound he said never a word of his altered condition."

"N—o—o," Lady Betty replied, opening her eyes wider and wider. "What is the mystery—why is he Gerard and not Mr. Crewe, and why are you so astonished that he took me for a drive?"

"Because on Thursday morning I found him lodged in a garret with nothing but a pennyworth of clove-pinks to compensate him for all the luxuries he has lost. Surprised—no; now I know him I am not surprised at what he did to give you pleasure. 'Twas not a miserable pride that made him conceal his poverty, but the fear that the knowledge would prevent you accepting his services. Surprised!" The Doctor exclaimed giving his thigh another slap—"not a bit of it. He is a Talbot."

"Talbot!" cried Lady Betty, catching his arm with trembling eager fingers—"Talbot!"

"Yes, he is our poor Tom's brother!"

"And he is quite poor?"

"Yes, poor as a poet. He has given up his fashionable trade, because it was not fit for an honest gentleman, and because the honour of his family rests upon him."

"How can he be poor and Tom's brother?"

"Tom never knew of the relationship."

"Ah! I understand—but——"

"Why does he not inherit his brother's estate, you ask. My dear, these are circumstances which I cannot tell you. Tom was the son of Admiral Talbot's first wife; Gerard, the son of the second; but between them a third person was born, who was not the Admiral's son, and he, unfortunately, usurps a claim which cannot be contested."

"I do not want to know that. Gerard is poor, and he spent money that he could ill afford to give his brother's sweetheart pleasure."

"You need not regret it, Miss Betty," the Doctor said, seeing the tear in her eye.

"Regret it, no! I rejoice in it. Tom would have done that, but no man else except his brother!"

"They are gentlemen—English gentlemen to the marrow, Miss Betty!"

"And what is Mr.—, what is Gerard—Gerard Talbot doing in his poor garret?"

"What usually is done in a garret—he is writing a comedy. He brought a few pages in his pocket yesterday, and I assure you 'tis prodigious fine. I wanted my friend Baxter to hear 'em read, but the poor man couldn't be spared. However, I have bound Gerard to come every Sunday, and read his week's work after dinner until the five acts are finished. And you shall come on Sundays, and so shall Baxter, and we will listen to the man's work, and give him our poor help, if we see right to advise. What say you to that, Miss Betty?"

Lady Betty's eyes glowed with pleasure. She longed to look at Gerard in the new character he bore to her.

"He is my brother—as much as though the parson had married me to Tom," she cried.

"Well, well," said the Doctor, taking out his snuff-box. "We shall see about that. At any rate, you agree to dine with us next Sunday, and every Sunday after, don't you, my dear?"

"Oh, yes—that is——" Lady Betty's face lengthened. "I am only a governess, and Mrs. Baxter——"

"Oh! I'll settle her—that is, Baxter will arrange all that. He has a wonderful influence over his wife has Baxter."

"I shall be happy—very happy to come and listen to his voice. I thank you very much for the kindness in thinking of me—and Doctor Blandly——"

"Well, my dear."

"Do you mind my sending the elbow chair here?"

"Send it by all means. Is it the chair you mentioned in your letter?"

"Yes—I couldn't sell it, and I do not want to take it amongst strange people."

"Let me have it. It shall be taken care of whatever it is."

Lady Betty faltered:

"'Tis—'tis—'tis the chair we used to call Tom's."

CHAPTER XLIX.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

MRS. BAXTER acceded to Doctor Blandly's request that Miss St. Cyr should be permitted to spend her Sundays with him. When he asked for the same privilege to be accorded to the Reverend John Baxter, she coldly said that her husband was master of his own actions, and was at liberty to do as he chose.

"In that case you will come next Sunday," said Doctor Blandly.

The Reverend John Baxter, with tears in his eyes, said that he had promised to explain Bunyan's "Holy War" to his children, and could not escape.

"Very well then, you will come the Sunday following," said the Doctor, in a tone of irritation.

The Vicar looked at his wife for permission, but that Lady stood with her arms folded one upon the other below her spare bosom, her nostrils pinched, her lips hermetically closed, and her stony eyes fixed on vacancy—the very picture of indifference.

"Mrs. Baxter said you are to do as you chose," cried the Doctor; "unless you doubt the truth of her assertion, which would be unpardonable, you will follow your own wishes; and if you do not come I shall take your refusal as a direct affront."

Baxter plucked up courage, and in a faltering voice accepted the Doctor's invitation.

In consequence of this arrangement, Doctor Blandly begged Gerard to defer the reading of his work for a week, which he willingly agreed to do, for as yet he was not proud of his work.

and very much preferred devoting his thoughts to Lady Betty than to his comedy.

He was astonished by the change he found in her. She had never been to him so softly sweet and charming. She was at the house when he arrived, and ran down the steps and across the grass-plot to meet him. She called him Gerard for the first time, as she held his hand and looked up into his face with wide, melting eyes. She pressed him to take refreshment after the fatigue of his journey. She seemed nervously happy, like a child in the presence of a long-expected friend. She listened eagerly to everything he said, smiled when he smiled, was gravely anxious when he spoke of the difficulties attending the work he had undertaken; he felt that her eyes were fixed upon him when he was speaking to Doctor Blandly. As they sat under the apple-tree, she with a lapful of flowers which she was making up into bouquets for the decoration of Doctor Blandly's chimney-piece, it was his taste she consulted first in the selection, his approval she demanded. Now and then she looked up from her occupation to his face, and returned to it with a smile.

Was the happiness due to the natural surroundings of flower and verdure, or to his having entered the field of literature, Gerard asked himself.

After doing full justice to the excellent damson pie Kate had prepared for the occasion, Doctor Blandly, despite his endeavours to keep awake, dropped into a doze, seated in his Windsor chair; then Lady Betty proposed a walk in the shady side of the garden. She slipped her hand under Gerard's arm, and was first to break the silence which a mutual happiness had produced.

"I know all, Gerard," she said softly.

"All, Lady Betty?"

"All that Doctor Blandly thought fit for me to know—all that I want to know. 'You are poor dear Tom's brother, and since I am his widow—for indeed our hearts were one—you are my brother also. We are not quite alone in the world, you and I—we have lost and we have found. And you are glad to have me for a sister, aren't you?'"

"I did not expect to gain so much of your affection."

"But you loved me, all the same. You said to yourself, 'There's my poor little sister all alone in the dismal house in Park Lane; she has no one to comfort her, no one to take her away from herself,' and you saved up your money, though you were horribly poor, to hire a carriage for my use. And while I still regarded you as a stranger, and looked upon your generous

kindness as a mere act of gallantry, you felt towards me as I feel towards you now."

"Doctor Blandly has told you more than he should."

"Not one word, Gerard, for he knew 't would make me happy, and lessen my grief. And, besides, should there be any secrets between us, who are so near to each other? There is nothing I would conceal from you. I have made up my mind to tell you every Sunday when we meet all that has happened during the week, just as a sister should tell her brother. I have quite a great deal to tell you about my new engagement. Poor Mr. Baxter is quite a martyr: his bread is buttered for him like the children's, and Mrs. Baxter is a tyrant—though she is excessively gracious to me, and would make me ill with good things if she could—but she is a tyrant for all that, and she has a mouth like this—look."

"A pretty mouth then under the most adverse conditions," said Gerard, regarding the little *moue* Lady Betty made with her soft, pretty lips.

"Even a brother's compliment must be acknowledged," said Lady Betty, making a mock courtesy. She was gay with excitement; and again taking Gerard's arm, she continued: "Of course I cannot tell you much yet—for I only took my 'situation' yesterday; but I shall keep a diary, and you shall see it if you like, when we meet on Sundays. The boys, my pupils, are dreadful children: they kick their father's shins when their mother's back is turned. I have made them understand that they will have to treat me with more respect, or they will form the subject of an additional chapter to Fox's 'Book of Martyrs.' I pity poor Mr. Baxter this afternoon, he has to interest them with an explanation of Bunyan's 'Holy War.' I could never understand it, could you?"

"I don't think that I ever attempted to."

"I used to love the 'Pilgrim's Progress' until I was told it was a kind of riddle with a moral answer to it." Lady Betty paused, possibly to take breath, and after a moment's silence, she said, giving Gerard's arm a little pinch:

"I am so glad you are writing a comedy, Gerard."

"You prefer a poor poet to a wealthy gamester?"

"That depends. Poets as a rule are rather ridiculous, whereas there is a dash and spirit about gamesters that recommend them to my taste. I do like courage, even when it is not quite what folks call 'proper.'"

"There is no courage in playing with the assurance of winning, and a gamester who plays for his living must have that assurance."

"That is true. 'Tis, perhaps, simply because the gamester wears a better coat than girls prefer him to the poet. Men are guided by what they think, we girls by what we see, I believe."

"Would you have liked me equally had I remained a gamester?"

"Oh, no; you wouldn't have seemed to me like a brother of Tom's if you had done that which he would have scorned to do. And I couldn't have felt so proud of you if you had not accepted poverty for the honour of your name."

"Still you do not care for poets."

"Not those who write elegant lines and are always rhyming anguish and languish, and hearts and darts. Oh, I hate the name of Phyllis! Those poets are very different to men who can write plays. How many acts shall you have in your comedy?"

"Five."

"I hope they will be good long acts."

"You are not afraid that your patience will be exhausted?"

"Oh, no; I am always sorry when a play is over, and I shall be ready to cry when the irritable old father is at length forced to give his consent to the marriage of the young people, and the servants and friends drop in and begin to form a semicircle at the back of the principal characters."

"But supposing I end my comedy in a different manner?"

"Can you, Gerard?" asked Lady Betty, in grave doubt.

"I think so."

"You must be clever."

"That remains to be seen. I have doubts."

"I have none," cried Lady Betty, firmly. "A man who can do admirable things must be able to write them. When do you think you shall finish your comedy?"

"By the end of the year, I hope."

"There are a great many Sundays before then, and you will read all that you have done every week. That will be lovely. And afterwards it will be played at the theatre."

"If the manager does not reject it."

"Oh, he cannot be so stupid as all that. Doctor Blandly and I will have a side-box all to ourselves, and get there the moment the doors open, and I shall be dreadfully impatient until the curtain goes up, but all the same I wouldn't miss a moment of the time; and then, when the curtain drops, I will clap. It may not be genteel, but I'll clap with all my might. I should like Mr. and Mrs. Baxter and the children to be somewhere in the house where I could see them—not in the same box with me. I should not have patience with them, they would seem

so commonplace and vulgar. How those boys would clap if I promised them something—or if their father told them not to. And then, when the five acts were played, all the audience would insist upon your coming forward on the stage, and then I shouldn't be able to see you for crying."

The girl's eyes were tearful in anticipation of such joy, and Gerard, looking down upon her sensitive, sweet face, felt that there was a stronger incentive to struggle for success than poverty.

"Dear heart o' me!" exclaimed the Doctor, opening his eyes about this time, "I declare I must have lost consciousness for half a minute. Where are the young people? I must make my excuses to them for my want of manners."

He jumped up, and catching sight of their figures through the hollyhocks, crossed the lawn briskly in that direction. Suddenly he paused. They had their backs towards him, walking leisurely down the path, Lady Betty leaning on Gerard's arm, he looking down upon her face.

The Doctor took out his snuff-box, planted his feet a foot asunder, set his head on one side, and, slowly smoothing the lid of his box with the ball of his thumb, said to himself, "The child loves him for being the brother of her dead lover; but the end of loving him for the sake of another will probably be that she will love him for himself, thinking more of him as another fades from her memory."

Then the Doctor took his pinch, which seemed to give him much satisfaction.

CHAPTER L.

IN TOM'S PLACE.

LADY BETTY hailed the returning Sunday with a feeling of intense satisfaction. The occupation of the week had not distressed her—had not been half so unpleasant as she expected. The children had distracted her thoughts, and made her forget her troubles for the greater part of the day. But she did not wish to forget: it seemed to her like the neglect of an affectionate duty to give so little of her time to the memory of Tom. The vague religious teaching she had received led her to imagine that his immortal spirit was cognisant of all she did, and she feared to grieve him by neglect. She did not think of his sensitive jealousy as a mortal weakness.

She longed for a day to devote to him; to kneel in church

and worship God and holy things with his unseen essence by her side. After the service she would go home with Doctor Blandly, and there meet Gerard, in whom she found, or fancied that she found, a hundred points of resemblance to her dead lover, and who was united to her by sympathy and an affinity of misfortune.

Mrs. Baxter's religion was of another kind, and Sunday was, of course, a day of penance. From the moment she rose she spoke in a low, sepulchral voice, as if some one lay dead in the house. She walked slowly and firmly, moving like an engine at half speed. She made the chocolate weaker than usual, and substituted dry toast for the customary dish of bacon. Half an hour before it was necessary she arrayed herself in the most hearse-like costume, a sable plume in her beaver bonnet, and a black velvet pall over her shoulders, and sat in the sitting-room issuing orders to the servant-maid in the kitchen without moving her head or a muscle of her limbs. The moment that the church bell commenced to call folks to church she summoned Baxter, and having inspected him from the top of his wig to the tag of his shoe-string, to assure herself that he was in a creditable state, she took his arm and led him off to the church.

Lady Betty followed with the two boys, Samuel and Luke, and took them with her into the vicar's family pew, while Mrs. Baxter, having cast a sharp eye round the empty church to see that the pew-opener had neglected none of his duties, conducted her husband into the vestry to give him the finishing touches before abandoning him to his own devices.

The Vicar's family-pew was a square stronghold, with high oak walls, which defended its occupants from vulgar observation. As the door closed, the two boys went to their hassocks, sank upon their knees, and buried their faces in their hands. Lady Betty sat for a moment looking at them with adoring love in her heart. They were rude and tiresome in their daily lives, they had no respect for their father, they fought in private, they stole the sugar on those rare occasions when it was unguarded by lock and key, they ate of the fruit which was all forbidden in their mother's orchard, but their faults found expiation in Lady Betty's eyes by this simple act of devotion. Could she offer to heaven a prayer so innocent and acceptable as theirs? As she knelt she implored with her whole heart to be made trusting and simple as these little children.

The rustling of her dress and the silence that followed were interrupted by the two boys, and a soft Samuel with his mouth

open, turned his head cautiously, and then Luke, with his tongue hanging out, did the same, and both perceiving that "teacher" was deep in prayer, they grinned at each other. Then Samuel rummaged in his pocket for a stump of lead pencil, while Luke turned back the cushion silently, after that they began a silent but exciting game of noughts and crosses, which was not without significance.

The bell pealed and then tolled, pews opened and shut, coughing began in good earnest, the clerk took his place in the box under the pulpit, and suddenly Luke turned back the cushion, Samuel concealed the stump of pencil in his capacious mouth, and both buried their faces again, for among the many sounds they distinguished the approaching footsteps of their mother. She looked round at her children and her governess with a feeling of devout satisfaction, and as she also knelt, she considered that it would be false humility to deny that she had done her duty to Heaven and to her family. Then the Reverend John Baxter ascended his pulpit, from which, as from a donjon, he could securely look down into the family fortress below, and the service began.

When the congregation rose, Lady Betty obtained a glimpse of the gallery; she turned her eyes towards the seat occupied by Doctor Blandly, and saw Gerard standing by his side. Her face flushed with pleasure, and a sign of recognition passed between them which did not escape Mrs. Baxter. Who could this thin, elegant young gentleman be? she asked herself, a friend of Doctor Blandly's? Why had she heard nothing of him from Baxter? Was he engaged to Lady Betty? if so, why had she not discovered the fact under that delicate cross-examination to which she had been subjected during the week? When they met at the church-door after the service, she learnt that his name was Gerard Talbot, and it somewhat reconciled her to her husband's departure to think that she should know all that was to be known of the stranger when Baxter returned at night.

As soon as Lady Betty was alone with Gerard, Doctor Blandly leading the way with Baxter across the meadow from the Vicarage, she said, taking his arm:

"Thank you, Gerard."

"For what, Lady Betty?"

"For coming so early."

"Didn't you expect me?"

"Not so early. The first coach does not arrive on Sunday before half-past eleven; I asked."

"Then you hoped I might come early!"

"Of course I did! It must cost a great deal for a carriage all that distance from London."

"It cost me nothing, I walked."

"Oh, poor Gerard! You must be worn out."

Gerard laughed.

"'Tis no distance for a man," said he. "Such a morning as this would tempt me to walk, if I were ten times lazier."

"'Twas not the morning that induced you to come: if it had rained ever so hard you would have come all the same. You said to yourself, 'it will please my sister to see me in church,' and that was sufficient."

"Perhaps it would have been sufficient had I said to myself, 'it will please me to see my sister.'"

"You use the very words that Tom would have used, Gerard," sighed she.

He did not reply, and she attributing the shade of sadness which had overcast his face to recollections of his dead brother, endeavoured to remove the effect her words had produced by changing the subject.

"Have you written much of your comedy this week?" she asked.

"I have finished the first act. Last night I saw Mr. Kemble, and he promises to read what I have done, and give me his opinion, if I take it to him next week."

"Oh, that is famous news. You must have worked very hard."

"I found it easier to write thinking of all you said last Sunday. You have given me hope and courage."

"'Tis little enough I can do to help you, Gerard. I am not clever, and 'tis not with cleverness I would help you, for I would have the glory of succeeding to be due to you alone. But all that I can do to make your task less difficult, your life less burdensome, that I will do with all my heart." She paused, they were both silent for a time, then she continued: "I have been trying to think in these last few moments how I can be of service to you, but I can find no means of gratifying my wish. I am like a poor bankrupt who sees distress all around him, and has no means of giving relief. What can I do?"

Gerard's arm trembled beneath her hand as he said in a low voice:

"Suffer me to hope."

"For success, Gerard? why that is assured. I am certain that your comedy will be well accepted."

"I have built hopes far higher than the mere triumph of my brain. Knowing what I have been, what I am, I dare scarcely tell myself all that my soul desires."

"Whisper but a word, and I will guess the rest. Why should you conceal anything from me? Is there anyone living dearer to me than you?"

"If you knew how solitary my life has been, how utterly alone and uncared for I have stood amongst my fellow-creatures, you would understand the emotion that your mere friendship produces, and readily perceive what hope my exalted imagination conceives."

Lady Betty looked at the agitated man beside her in perplexity a moment, and then:

"Is it my affection you hope for?" she asked.

"It is indeed."

"Why, Gerard, you have it. Are you not my brother as well as his? How doubtful you men are. Tom, my husband, doubtful of my love, and you, my brother, of my affection. Kiss me, Gerard—kiss my lips, and doubt no more that I am in truth your sister."

Gerard bent and touched her willing lips, and she looked at him afterwards with wide eyes, her cheeks pale with anxiety for his peace, and finding him still troubled, she did what a woman usually does in such emergencies, turned the subject, and endeavoured to interest him in different matters.

"What a fool my passion has made me—how blind and rash," thought Gerard; "but that her thoughts of love can dwell only on poor Tom, she would have caught the meaning of my words, and straightway I must have lost her affection and respect together."

The Reverend John Baxter sat down to his dinner in the merriest of moods; he grew grave after the roast, and learned with the pie; after that he loosened the lower button of his waistcoat, and attacked the port in silence. Lady Betty led the way with Gerard to the garden; the doctor and the parson were so long to follow, that it was to be presumed they took that which is the best digestive of a good dinner—a doze. However, they were both wide awake when they at length made their appearance, and neither Gerard nor Lady Betty showed any signs of impatience.

"Jerry will bring us a dish of tea to settle our spirits, and then, Gerard, we will hear the new comedy," said Doctor Blandly.

A table was set under the apple-tree, and when Jerry had served the tea, Doctor Blandly placed a chair before the board for Lady Betty, and was about to seat himself, when he stopped abruptly, and turning to Jerry, said with asperity—

"How is this, Sir? Only three chairs for four people. Fetch another, instantly."

Gerard, as the younger, stood; the two elder gentlemen seated themselves. Presently Jerry returned carrying a velvet-covered chair.

"'Tis Tom's!" cried Lady Betty, catching sight of it, and half rising from her seat, alarmed lest the sacred seat should be profaned.

"Then I think, my dear, it will be very proper that we ask Gerard to use it," said Doctor Blandly, with quiet firmness.

Lady Betty smiled faintly, and murmured: "He is next in our hearts."

And so Gerard took Tom's place in the empty chair, as Doctor Blandly had doubtless intended he should. Before the cups were empty, Doctor Blandly, with Lady Betty's permission, lit his pipe, that he might, with the philosophic calm produced by the smoke of good birdseye, consider the merits of the literary work about to be read; and then looking round to see that the Reverend John Baxter was also in full possession of his faculties, he said:

"Now, Sir; for the comedy."

And Gerard, without hesitation, opened his manuscript and read.

A very good picture they formed, that little company sitting under the apple-tree, against a background of peaches and pink hollyhocks. Lady Betty in her black crape dress with short sleeves, her long white, round arms resting upon her lap; Doctor Blandly, with his shapely legs crossed, his portly person, his fair, strong, yet kindly face, his head thrown well back in critical expectancy, and pouting his lips over the waxed end of his long pipe; the Reverend John Baxter with his elbow on his knee, his chin upon his thumb, his index finger sagely pointed towards his red nose, his brows knitted with intense intellectual application; and lastly, Gerard, spare, white and anxious, seated in his brother's chair, and turned with his face towards Lady Betty, holding the manuscript before him.

CHAPTER LI.

BARNABAS AND HIS COURT.

WHILE the wines in the cellar of Talbot House held out, Barnabas realised his own ideal of happiness. He lived royally,

according to his own conception. His court was composed of the half-dozen rascals who had supported his entrance to the estate, and the vagabond lawyer served for prime minister. His leg was yet painful; he could not move about without a stick or some such support, but this inconvenience was of small importance, as he had no inclination for exercise, and rarely stirred from his seat. He sat at the head of the long oak table, in the grand old banqueting-hall, in a capacious high-backed chair, his leg supported on cushions, one hand resting on a Venetian glass, and the other holding a halfpenny clay pipe. His lawyer sat at his right hand, his followers sat below, each man with a bottle and a paper of tobacco before him.

He boasted and lied, and his court listened. He told old filthy jests, and they roared with laughter; he swore, and they looked grave. If anyone fell asleep under the influence of the drink before him, he rose from his seat, maugre his leg, took a candle from the sconce, and set fire to the sleeper's hair, or poured red wine down his neck, and limped back to his seat grinning malignantly. He was too vile to laugh heartily, even at the success of his own practical jokes. When he himself was besotted and drowsy, he swept bottles and glasses off the table, sprawled out his arms, and laid his leaden head upon them moaning and grunting until his drunkenness had passed off and he could sit up to drink again. They never went to bed, never changed their linen, never touched water, but sat there, drinking and sleeping, occasionally eating, perpetually smoking, until the floor was strewn with broken bottles and gnawed bones, and the great room stank with the filthy tobacco, and the reek of that foul company. One day Barnabas awaking from a long sleep, more sober than usual, looked round upon the litter of broken bottles and his sleeping comrades, and after five minutes cogitation, roared out for Slink.

"How many bottles are there in the cellar?" he asked, when Slink appeared at the door.

"About a score, your honour."

"What!" shouted Barnabas.

Slink repeated his answer, keeping on the alert to dodge the bottle which Barnabas generally hurled when displeased.

"Come here, and help me up. I'll go and see for myself."

He hobbled down to the cellar with much difficulty and profuse blasphemy, and ascertained that Slink had told him nothing but the truth. Then swearing at his friends, at himself for his insane liberality, he locked the cellar-door, and returned to his customary seat with the key in his pocket. From

that moment he did not part with it except when he wanted a bottle for his own consumption.

When his fellows awoke and called for refreshment, Barnabas bade Slink bring a can of water, and bluntly told them that they would get no other kind of liquor at his expense in future. The moment that this new regulation was found to be no practical joke but a serious fact, the company withdrew to the other end of the table and held a council, while Barnabas smoked and looked at them in sullen indifference. At the end of a brief conference, the lawyer came forward as spokesman and addressed Barnabas.

"Your friends have got business to do. They wish to be paid for their services and to go to their homes," said he.

"Well, pay them, and let them go," replied Barnabas, with an oath.

"I have no money."

"You said the steward had the collecting of the rents."

"He refuses to give me anything."

"And quite right too—send for him."

The steward was sent for and presently came.

"You have had some rents to collect from the cottages: where is it?" asked Barnabas.

"In my keeping," replied Blake.

"Give it to me."

"Not a penny-piece," said Blake, folding his arms. "My orders be to give all that comes in to Doctor Blandly."

"What has Doctor Blandly to do with my estate?"

"Doctor Blandly is Mr. Tummus's agent, and I'm his servant."

"Well, then you can just go and serve Mr. Thomas," Barnabas said with a sneer and another oath, "and if you are not off the estate in half an hour, I'll have you kicked off."

"The first man that lays his hand on me shall be taken to the lock-up, and the rest after them, if they dare to interfere with me."

"We will soon see about that! Take the old fool and pitch him into the horse-pond, you fellows."

No one moved a hand. He swore and threatened in vain. The steward stood unmoved.

"You and that old idiot the Doctor, shall answer for this," cried Barnabas, smashing a glass down on the floor. "Do you still refuse to obey me?"

"Yes, I serve only Doctor Blandly, and these are my orders. You are to be suffered to remain at the Hall and keep what company and servants you like at your own expense. You are to be allowed to shoot game for your own use. But

if you offer a single bird for sale, or remove but one article from the house, or cut so much as a single branch from one of the trees, I'm to take the lawyer's papers before the nearest magistrate and demand his protection of Mr. Thomas's property."

"The property's mine now my brother is dead."

"Ah! you'll have to prove that."

Barnabas turned to his lawyer, who appeared to be not at all surprised at what he heard.

"Here, what's to be done?" he asked.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you want to know anything more of me?" asked the steward.

"Get out, curse you!" shouted Barnabas.

Humphrey Blake left the room.

"You said I could take possession," said Barnabas.

"You have," replied his counsellor.

"But how am I to defeat this cursed Doctor Blandly?"

"Find the body of your brother, and you can laugh at him."

"By George, I will. Set a score of fellows to drag the river from end to end."

"Give me the money to pay them."

"I haven't a guinea. Raise money for me—I'll sign any paper you like—you shall make your own terms for payment when I get the money."

"It is impossible to raise money until your title is established."

"You said you could make a case for the Court of Chancery."

"So I can, but not without money. You owe me a long bill now."

"But I'll pay you what you ask when I get my title—why don't that satisfy you?"

"Because I don't believe you ever will get your title."

Amidst the storm of oaths and imprecations that followed this announcement, the lawyer and his associates withdrew, merely putting in their pockets such articles of value as they could conceal from the vigilant eyes of the steward, and one by one sneaked away from the Hall and its penniless tenant, with no intention of returning.

The only immediate regret Barnabas felt in their departure was, that it had not taken place before. They had drunk best part of his wine, and what should he do when he had finished the remainder? The question was fraught with such gloomy forebodings that he despatched it from his thoughts, determining to face the evil when it came—as often before he had

shirked the reflection that he would be hanged at some subsequent date. It was when night came, and the candles failed to light up the further corners of the large room, that he missed his companions. The dim corners had a fascination for his eyes, which grew with the terrible pictures that came before his heated and disordered imagination. He pictured Tom in the likeness of a corpse he had once seen drawn from a pond after long lying there, and fancied him stepping in that hideous mortality from out the gloom.

"Light all the candles!" he said to Slink.

"There be but a dozen left, master, and they are nigh down to the sockets," said Slink, as he moved to obey the command.

He asked himself what night would be with neither companions, nor wine, nor light. The reflection was productive of a fresh command:

"Fetch me another bottle, and then blow out every candle but one."

As the lights one after another were blown out he drank the bottle, his eyes wandering from corner to corner; when only one was left he shut his eyes and tried to sleep.

The next day he sent Slink out to sell his horse. Slink obeyed with a sorry heart, for the horse had been his comfort through the miserable months, and had improved in appearance under his careful grooming, since the first unlucky day it was given to him. He had not the spirit to higgie over the sale, and accepting the first offer that was made for the beast, he brought his master forty shillings, and had a bottle flung at his head for his pains. The money was spent in candles and strong ale.

Once more at night-time he forced Slink to play at picquet, but with nothing to gain and no inducement to cheat, the play had so little hold upon his mind, that his senses were for ever wandering to catch strange noises or the fantastic shadows thrown by a guttering candle. His only recourse was to stupefy his brain with tobacco and beer.

One morning he limped up the staircase and along the great corridor to examine the chambers. They were all large, but one seemed less awful than the rest, and he decided upon going there at night, thinking to sleep sounder in a bed than cramped over a table. But when the light faded, he dared not go away from the banqueting-hall—that at least he knew; its nooks and hollows were familiar to him.

The corridor was mysterious even in the light which came through the coloured oriel window at the end, it would be awful at night. And the chamber—might it not have a secret

door; might he not find something lying in the bed when he opened it; these reflections passed through his muddled, enfeebled, guilty mind, and kept him to the larger room.

There was no one in the great house but himself and Slink. Slink was indispensable. He shot the game, cooked it, ate with him, submitted to his bullying, slept in the same room lying on the sofa, in that dark corner which Barnabas feared most, and waited on him with the docility and patience of a born servant. But he added not a little to his nightly terrors.

When he detected his master pausing to listen, in the act of raising a glass to his lips, he showed the liveliest symptoms of creak, ejaculating, "Oh, Lord!" and "merciful powers defend us!" and fell a chattering with his teeth as though in an ague: if Barnabas dropped his pipe, and fixed his eyes upon the obscurity, Slink would drop on his knees, imploring the angels to have mercy upon him.

"What are you afraid of?" Barnabas asked one night. "You've fastened the shutters and barred all the doors, haven't you?"

"All the doors I know on, master; but what does that signify! The place is like a rabbit warren; there's a dozen passages only known to the rightful owners; a dozen doors as open secret-like into the west wing. You can smell the mouldering walls and the rotten floors when you pass by the big staircase, for all its bein' shut off this hundred years, and closed with boards and green baize that the great, long-legged spiders and wood-louses crawl over. What's doors to ghosts?"

"Ghosts! What are you talking about? D'ye think I take heed of such rubbish?"

"It may be rubbish, but I've heard as murdered men must walk till they're laid with bell and candle, and whose to lay Master Tom, when his body's—— Oh, good Lord; what are you looking at, master?"

"Hold your cursed tongue, and go sit over yonder where the curtain hangs."

CHAPTER LII.

THE MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

IT WAS a wretched existence that Slink led even in the broad light of day, when Barnabas himself was free from superstitious apprehensions.

Humphrey Blake, having sifted all the evidence he could

collect, had arrived at a tolerably close approximation to the truth. Why Doctor Blandly pooch-pooched his conclusions he did not know; he was equally in the dark as to the true relationship of Barnabas to the Talbot family. What he maintained, with the persevering obstinacy of conceit, was that Barnabas was an impostor, and in all probability Master Tom's murderer. Doctor Blandly's obstinacy in refusing to credit his belief piqued the egotistical old man's pride, and strengthened his desire to prove the truth of his convictions. One person could if he chose reveal the fact, and he was Slink.

But Slink, for a very good reason, was silent and stubborn, and refused not only to tell the latter events in his master's career, but to reveal any of his antecedents, despite the most artful and persevering cross-examination to which the steward subjected him. Wrath against him for his contumacy rather than for any supposed participation in the murder, Blake unwisely removed the one chance he had of making discoveries—he forbade Jenny, on pain of being sent away to her maiden aunt in Lancashire, to speak to Slink. On the other hand, he threatened Slink with the most severe punishment if he caught him sneaking about the lodge.

By these means he hoped to bring the lad to confess; but as time went on and Slink made no sign of submission, he extended his punishment by forbidding the workers on the estate to have any communication with Slink, so that the poor fellow suffered all the pains of ostracism, with the additional pain of knowing those who shunned him for old friends. Master Blake refused to let him have even the company of a dog, and forbade him to enter any of the stables except that set apart for his master's horse. There would have been pleasure in shooting hares with a dog to start them from their coverts; there was none in hunting alone.

One morning he shot a wood-pigeon, and as he was jumping down the bank into the road, to secure the fluttering bird, his ears were greeted with the sound of a well-remembered voice, crying in a rich brogue:

"Well done, me boy; I couldn't a hit um better myself."

Turning round he discovered the old pedlar, Barney O' Crewe, seated on the bank, with his pack on one side of him, a bottle on the other, and three inches of black clay pipe between his fingers.

"Whoy faix, 'tis my own swate friend, Toby!" the pedlar exclaimed, rising and then grasping Slink's hand, he added, "Oi'm charmed to renew th' acquaintance, darlint."

The devil himself, with such a warm demonstration of

friendship, would have been welcome to the unhappy Slink; whatever doubts he might have had as to the pedlar's sincerity were forgotten, and hearing the unctuous voice, he could only remember the songs and stories which had delighted him in the loft on the night of their previous meeting. He grinned from ear to ear, and beamed grateful acknowledgment of the friendly overtures.

"An' y'are out in the mornun a shootin' birds and bastes, like a rale gentleman, as y'are."

Slink nodded assent.

"It does me good to see the same," continued the pedlar. "And is the master wid yer?"

"He's at the Hall, being laid up with a broken leg, but it's nigh healed now."

"Ah! he's got into the Hall, has he? good luck to him; and he's taken his own proper name, Mr. Thaophilus Talbot, Esquire?"

Slink nodded again.

"Well, my boy, ye shall jist take me up to the Hall the way ye've come, for I'm not proud, and I've a mighty pradelection against passing the lodge, which is the raison I've been resting myself on this sod for the last hour, takun a philosophicle look at things. Putt your lips, to commence wid, at the bottle, darlint; you know the flavor of it, ye divil ye deu! Putt the bird in your pockut, 'tis an illigant bird, to be sure, and a murtherin' sin to lave it behint."

Slink pocketed the bird, and with a glance down the road to be sure that Master Blake was not in sight, assisted the old pedlar in climbing up the bank and entering the wood. When these difficulties were overcome, the garrulous Barney recommenced talking, leaning affectionately upon the arm of his young friend.

"I've been a prayun to the blessed saints for ye, darlint, and I hope to goodness the master t'akes ye koindly."

"That's all right," said Slink.

"Beca'se 'tis a jewel in his crown to have a faithful sarvint, and there's few in the warld that's the loikes of you, divil a wan! Ye deserve to be trated handsome, and ye shall be, for oim gown to stay a bit wid the master, and I'll spake a good word in your favor, besides entertainin' ye wid all the beautiful songs and stories in my rickollection, wid a taste of the bottle in betwixt and betwane."

Slink's face expanded in the broadest of grins.

"Ye shall take another taste of the same, immagiate as a token, darlint."

He stopped, drew out the stone bottle from his pack, and having administered the dose and resumed his march, he said, in a tone more wheedling and soft than ever:

"'Tis the blessed saints as guided ye to me this mornun in answer to my prayers, for I've been a dyun to see you a long toime, and have an agraible convirsation wid ye. And now ye shall tell me all what's been a happenin' to ye since I bade ye good-bye at the 'Lone Crow.'"

He paused to give Slink an opportunity of acting upon his suggestion, but finding him disinclined to break silence he continued:

"I've been making inquiries in the town, and the inn beyond the hill, and they tell me that Misther Thomas Talbot has been croally murdered, but I can't belave it; is it thrue now?"

Slink nodded.

"Why wasn't I borned a lawyer?" Barney asked himself, and then with a smile he said: "So you know he was murdered. Now can you tell me in sacret and confidance who murdered 'um?"

"No, I can't," said Slink, stoutly.

"Well, that bothers me complateely, for they tells me it was the master as murdered 'um, and seein' you fellows 'um loike his own blessed shadder, 'tis impossable he could have done it and you not know. So I say, darlint, that y'are mistuk. Master Thomas was not murdered."

"Yes he was."

"But I say he was nut; and so how can ye say he was?"

"Because he was shot and——" Slink stopped suddenly.

"And buried dacent in the river. Thrue for you, my ewate friend; but how d'ye know he was shot, seein' his body was niver brought to light?"

Slink bent his brows in silence.

"I'd a been a raal judge, and done nothun but putt on the black cap from mornun' till night, if Providence had edicated me to the laigal proffission," thought the pedlar.

"Look here, sir," said Slink, "you'll see the master directly, and he can tell you all you want to know, I daresay. Let's talk about something else."

The amiable pedlar was so well pleased with himself and Slink that he made no objection to this proposal, but entered at once upon the narration of several anecdotes, which made the road to the Hall too short to his admiring companion.

Barnabas was no less pleased than Slink had been to see the pedlar. He had need of a lively companion, and hoped

that his father's superior cunning would enable him in a short time to be independent of assistance. He concealed his feelings, however, as well as he could, and only responded to O'Crewe's flattery and protestations of "ondying affliction" with a grunt or a nod.

Nothing daunted by this cold reception, the pedlar exerted himself to amuse his son, and get him into a good temper, and so far succeeded in raising him from his morbid prostration, that he saw the candles lit without a shudder, and bade Slink get out of the room directly after, partly because he could do without him, but chiefly because Slink evidently enjoyed the pedlar's conversation, and wished to stay.

Banished from the room, Slink contented himself with listening at the key-hole to the pedlar's songs and stories, until clapping his eye to the key-hole, after a minute's silence, he perceived him walking towards the door, when he retired with alacrity, and took refuge in a deep embrasure by the great stairs. From this hiding-place he saw the door open, and the pedlar come out and stand in a listening attitude for a moment or two, then return to the room, closing the door after him.

It was some time before he dared return to the door, but at length the misery of sitting alone in the dark and silence while good things were being said in the adjacent room overcame his fears of discovery, and he cautiously approached the convenient key-hole, and bent his ear to listen.

"Tis mighty hard, and so it is, to get the hold truth out of ye, Barney, my darlint," the pedlar was saying. "It does ye credit, and I'm proud on ye. If you was as simple as your sarvint, Slink, I'd turn ye inside out like a pair o' leather breeches in half a minit. If ye knowed how I've been a prayun to the holy saints, and sthrugglin' and sthrivin' to learn the blessed truth, to help ye in your misfortunes, ye'd be more agrable and complaisant. Isn't it all for your own good, my blessed Barney, that I'd have you reveale the holy sacrets of your bussom to me? Sure, I larned more from that swate innocint lamb, Mr. Slink, in two minutes than ye've condescended to tell me in half-an-hour."

"What has he told you—blabbing hound!"

"Nothing at all but to your honour. He only towld me how you shot um and throwed his body in the wather."

"It's a lie."

"To be sure I made a mistake. 'Twas you shot 'im, and the lad that throwed um into the river."

"I'll stop the fool's tongue; I'll have his life to-morrow."

"Barney, my darlint, y'are right. You shall have his life—but not to-morrow, my brave boy."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen to me, swaiteest. Ye want ividence of Masther Tom's death in order that ye may come into your holy rights and trew inheritance, don't ye?"

"Well?"

"Supposun to-morrow mornun, soon as the glorious sun is a-spreddun a blush of beauty over the charmun face o' nature, I go to the nairest magistrate and says, 'Yer honour, there's a secret on my moind that I must reveale or my conscience will droive me to dispiration. I know who 'twas that murdered and did for that gentleman of quality, Mr. Thomas Talbot?'"

"Will you betray me?"

"Not a bit of it, darlint. Putt down the bottle when you've took a drink. This is how the whole business wull be transacted. I'll say to the magistrate, 'If it plase your honour, Sor, I was walkun' along quite paceable by the side of the river, thinkin' o' nothing in the world but the blessed saints in heaven, whan I see a man on horseback comun' towards me, and taking him to be no better than a highwayman, I jumped t'other side the hedge, and laid there wid my pack in mortal tripidation and almighty fear, till all of a suddint I heard a pistol-shot and a serame, and the nixt moment I seed a horse run bye widout no one on his back at all at all, and the blessed Virgin inspirin' me wid the courage of a lion I crept along behint the hedge so as I couldn't be seen till I come in sight of a blackguard as was draggun' a gentleman into the cowl'd water. By the light of the blessed moon——'"

"There wasn't a moon."

"Thankye for the hint, my charmer. 'By the loight of the swate stars I see the countenance of the gentleman and the face of the blackguard perfectly clair. The face of the blackguard I shall niver forget to my dyn day. It terrified me to sich a degree that I took to my heels to save myself.' Whan I've told the magistrates this I shall weipe the perspiration off my brow, and I shall continy: 'Well, Sor, gown wid my pack to Talbot Hall to see if I could sell the gentry a paper of pins, or a small-comb, who should I foind there, in the livery of a sarvant, but the very blackguard I see a murderin the gentleman by the river, and it's him I'd have you take into custody.' What do you think o' that, Barney darlint?"

"What am I to say, for they'll come questionin me, plague take 'em."

"Nothun at all, darlint. Divil a word. Ye'll just take your

oath that you don't know nothin' about it, but that sure enough ye gave Slink leave to go and see his swateheart, and he didn't come back to ye till the mornin', wid a cock-and-bull story of gettin' drunk over-night; and since then, ye'll add, the varmint has been playin' ducks and drakes wid the money like water, gettin' drunk, and flirtin' wid the wenches."

"And then Slink will tell his story. How then?"

"Let um. Wait till I get in the witness-box. I know how to manage um. I'll terrify um wid my eye. I'll make the varmint swear black's white, and thremble and stutier and make such a fool of a liar of himself that the intilligent jury will be bound to hang um. I'll get the compliments and flattery of the judge and all the illigant lawyers for me ability, trust me."

"And what good will all this do me?"

"What good, d'ye ax? Faix, and 'tis not my own son that will ax the question twice. Sure, when they've hanged Slink for murderin' your brother, they can't dispute that the murdered man's dead; and then what's to bar your inheritance? And we will hang un as sure as justice."

Slink waited to hear no more.

About ten o'clock Barnabas roared for him—having emptied the great pot of ale. He roared a second time, and there was no answer.

Then the pedlar went to the door, and called out in his blindest tones:

"Toby, darlint, whoy don't ye come when yer master calls? Where are you, swaiteest?"

But his seductive appeal failed to elicit response from Slink, and for a very good reason: he was ten miles from Sevenoaks on his road to London.

CHAPTER LIII.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

SINK made his way to London through Ightham, Wrotham and Gravesend, feeling himself safer on the road he knew. He had not a farthing in his pocket, and in the morning hunger became unendurable. A stable-keeper gave him sixpence and as much as he wanted to eat and drink for a day's work in his stable. At night he continued his journey, but the rain falling heavily compelled him to take refuge in a barn, where he slept until the morning.

About midday Saturday he arrived at Edmonton, and rang the bell at Doctor Blandly's. Old Kate came to the gate, and bade him call in the evening; her master and Jerry had gone a-fishing. She could not say where they were, and advised him to go wait in the "Bell."

This was capital advice to a man with money, but Slink had spent his sixpence on the road, and was once more hungry and penniless. He dared not sit on the settle outside the inn, for he doubted not but that the pedlar had sworn information against him, and that all the country was in pursuit of him.

He turned up the little lane beside the Doctor's garden, and lay in a meadow until the sun went down, then he carefully approached the main road, and again rang at the Doctor's bell. This time Jerry came in response.

"Master's dining, but you can come in. If your business ben't very important, you had better wait till he's finished."

"Oh, my business ben't important. It's only a matter of life and death, and as I've waited since the morning, there's no reason why I shouldn't wait another hour or so—albeit I've had nothing betwixt my teeth since ten o'clock."

"Oh, you're one of those 'tis-but-tisn't, might-be-but-can't, gentry, I see. You'd better follow me, case I get blamed for your fault."

Slink followed Jerry, and having duly scraped his feet, and rubbed them well, heels and side, on a mat, he took off his hat, smoothed down his hair, and entered the dining-room when Jerry was satisfied with his presentability.

"Well, my man; what have you got to say to me?" the Doctor asked, with his mouth full.

Slink twisted his hat round, and glanced from the Doctor to Jerry, and back again to the Doctor without replying.

"Don't you hear what's said to you?" asked Jerry.

"Yes, Sir; but if you please, I don't want to speak before you, Sir."

The Doctor laughed heartily. "We'll you won't mind his knowing where you come from, I daresay," said he.

"Sevenoaks, your honour."

"Jerry, take that young fellow down to the kitchen, and give him a mug of ale and a thumb-piece; he hasn't anything in his stomach, I know by the sound of his voice. And don't worry him, do you hear, Jerry? When you're a bit refreshed, return to me here, my lad."

Slink obeyed with alacrity, and reappeared in the dining-room surprisingly soon, considering the quantity of ale and bread and

cheese he had consumed in the interval; but he had a wide mouth and a large throat, and his excellent digestive organs were equal to any task imposed upon them.

"Now my lad what is it?" the Doctor asked, clearing a space in front of him to rest his arms upon, as Jerry withdrew and closed the door. "Have you come from Mr. Blake the steward?"

"Not exactly, your honour, but very near, as one may say. It was the steward's daughter as told me to come to you."

"His daughter—the wench with red cheeks?"

"And beautiful dark eyes, your honour," Slink sighed.

"Ha! ha! The same story everywhere," the Doctor said half to himself. "Well, well; and wh—has she sent you to me?"

"Because she said you would stand by me if I told you the whole truth, and wouldn't let them hang me."

"Great Heavens!—hang you!—what for?"

"For murdering Master Tom."

Doctor Blandly raised himself in his chair, and looked at Slink in blank astonishment for a minute, then said in an altered tone:

"If this deed is yours alone, tell me nothing. I am loth to be instrumental to the death even of a criminal, unless it is absolutely my duty. If then you killed this poor gentleman of your own will and purpose, say not a word to me, but go out by that door while I close my eyes. But if—as by your appearance it seems to me more likely—you have been but the tool in the hands of a more villainous man, tell me what is on your mind, and I will do what I may to befriend you."

"God bless your honour! the guilt is not on my head. Let me tell you just what happened the night afore last as I listened at the door in Talbot Hall." And then Slink related the conversation he had overheard between Barnabas and his father: in conclusion he said "When I heard their scheme to bring me to the gallows, then I made up my mind to run away into the woods and hide myself there; but I couldn't go without first saying good-bye to my sweetheart, and begging her to disbelieve the wicked things they said against me, and it was she as bade me come to you and confess everything, 'For,' says she 'the Doctor's the justest man that ever lived, and won't see you hung for your master's crime,' she says."

The Doctor spoke, but Slink heard nothing but the sound of the bell which was at that moment pulled. Looking through the window, he saw over the tops of the gate, the eye and wrinkled forehead, and grey hair of Barney O'Crewe.

"My God!" he cried, "'tis the pedlar! Hide me, Doctor—hide me!"

"One word—is his story true?—did you kill Mr. Talbot?"

"No; I swear to heaven I didn't."

"Then all the pedlars in the world shan't touch you. Go upstairs, and in the first room you come to, lock the door, and crawl under the bed if you like. Jerry, bring the man at the gate in here if he wants to see me, and say not a word more than is necessary to him on the way."

Slink followed the doctor's advice to the letter, while Jerry admitted the pedlar and conducted him into Doctor Blandly's presence without returning a single word to his bland inquiries and persuasive addresses.

"'Tis Docthur Blandly I have the honour of salutin'," said the pedlar.

"That's my name. You can leave the room, Jerry. Return when I ring the bell."

"'Tis a jewel of a servint y'have, Doctor Blandly—a swate, civil spoken old man, as ever drawed the blessed breath of loife, with a dacent habit of holdin' his tongae, which leaves nothun to find fault wid in his speech."

"And who may you be, Sir?"

"The question's a very proper one, and does you credit, Docthor. and I'll answer ye widout any risarvation. I'm Mr. Barnabas O'Crewes."

"Barnabas O'Crewes—the father of the man who calls himself Theophilus Talbot?"

"That's as hereafter may be; at present you may take it that I'm his perticular friend. In the first place, Doctor, y'are doubtless aware that the murder of Mr. Talbot is discivered and brought to loight."

"Who is the murderer?"

"Toby Slink by name—the varmint as stole Mr. Thomas's horse, shot his dog, and finilly slaughtered the young gintleman and throwd him into the cowlid river. I see 'um do it wid my own eyes."

"Have you informed the magistrates?"

"I have. I've took my Bible oath on it; and the b'y's as good as hanged. Albeit, he's given us the slip—bad luck to um, and can't be found nowheres. However, oi'll foind um, lave me alone for that, I'll onairth um loike a fish from the blessed ocean. Now, Docthor, we'll preshume that he's hanged, and drawed and quarthered, and all complete, amen! and there's no furder obstacle to Thaophilus Talbot coming into possession of the funds y'are so kindly taken care of for um."

"Not a farthing. I will throw the estate into Chancery."

"I beg to differ wid ye, Doctor, on a pint of law. If the b'y 's hung for havin' murdered Mr. Thomas, how will ye prove that the gentleman is aloive?"

"You're a cunning rascal!" cried Doctor Blandly, striking the table with his fist.

"Thank you kindly for the compliment. I trust I'm a bit cliver in the law. Now Thaophilus has promised that I shall live like a prince when he come into his fortune—he's wullin to make splendid terms wid me to howld my tongue and live in his company."

"Then why don't you hold your tongue?"

"Because I set no value on all these riches, for two or three reasons. In the fust place, I don't think I should get 'em; in the second, I want money at once to hunt up that varmint Slink, for the public officers won't do their duty widout, bad luck to 'em; and in the third place, I don't hanker after livin in the society of Thaophilus—he's contracted an onpleasant habut of wakun up in the middle o' the noight and seeun ghostes that makes my blood run cold and oncomfortable."

"Well, well—come to the point."

"Bedad I'm comun to it straght. Docther dear, y' have a kind o' spite against Thaophilus."

"I have the same feeling toward other villains."

"Quite roight for you, Docther. I know that ye'd much rather see Mr. Gerard in Talbot Hall than his half-brother—for I'll tell you candid and thrue, Doctor, there being no witnesses present, that Mr. Gerard is no son of mine. And now widout no more bating about the bush, if you'll promuse me faithful to give me a thrifle—say two or three hundred pounds a year for the whole of my life till I die—I'll prove that Mr. Thaophilus is an imposter."

"You will say that of your own son?"

"To be sure will I. For I don't like the principals of um. Tha gettin' up o' nights ain't nat'ral and it ain't pleasant, and he'd chate his own father if he had the chance, bad luck to um. I'll swear he was three months old before ever he was registered, and that Admiral Talbot, Heaven rest his sowl—was no more the b'y's father than you are."

With knitted brows Doctor Blandly looked at Barney O'Crewe in silence whilst he considered his proposal. Had he his own inclinations alone to follow, he would have rung the bell for Jerry to show the old vagabond the garden-gate at once, but Gerard was to be thought of, and it was for Gerard to decide whether the evidence of a rascal should be bought and paid for,

He felt that the advantages, were too great to be relinquished hastily for a scruple which, after all, was one of delicacy rather than conscience.

"Well, Docther dear, and what do you think of ut?"

"What I think of it is of small importance. How Mr. Gerard Talbot takes your offer remains to be seen. I shall set the facts before him to-morrow, and on Monday, if you call here at ten o'clock, you shall know whether he accepts or rejects your proposal."

The Doctor rang the bell. Jerry answered immediately, and his presence stopped Barney O'Crewe from saying anything further upon a matter which he had every reason to keep secret. He had a mortal aversion to witnesses.

CHAPTER LIV.

QUICK AND DEAD.

THE pedlar had parted from his son early on Friday morning with the avowed intention of swearing information against Toby Slink with the nearest magistrate, and returning to his son "immaidjitly."

"Will you come wid me, Barney, darlint?" he asked.

"Tisn't likely," replied Barnabas.

"Maybe y'are wise, though y'are not sociable, the saints love ye. Kape ye'r spirits up, me charmer; I'll be back wid ye in the twinklin' of an oye."

As a matter of fact the old man never went near the magistrate, having resolved in the course of the night to take that somewhat hazardous course if he could not make satisfactory terms with Doctor Blandly. "A pig by the leg's worth a dozen in the bog; for it's all the world to a chaney orange you won't catch a hair of their backs—the sly varmin's," he said to himself, as lighting his pipe he trudged away from Talbot Hall, with his face towards London and his pack on his back.

Barnabas drank, smoke and dozed until mid-day; then feeling hungry he limped away to the kitchen to get the remains of the hare they had been eating for breakfast, and which his father had cleared away, saying he would make the place look a bit "dacent" in case the magistrates came to question Barnabas. There was not a scrap of food in the kitchen, and the pack which the pedlar had likewise removed for "dacency" was not there either. Barnabas extended his search from place to

place until his patience was exhausted, then he took to smashing everything breakable that came in his way, until his fury at finding himself cheated and robbed was abated; after that he sat down and tried to form a plan of revenge. His father had hinted at the "Lone Crow" of compromising with Doctor Blandly, and Barnabas had no doubt that he had gone to sell him.

What could he do to frustrate the plans of the subtle old man? Nothing. He felt himself utterly helpless. Not a soul stood by him; even Slink had abandoned him. His pockets were again empty—for his father, though ignorant of the game of piquet, had shown himself an adept at cheating and fleeced him of the small residuum remaining from the forty shillings brought him by the sale of Slink's horse. And he was hungry—villainously hungry. The very fact of not being able to get anything to eat increased his appetite. Drinking and smoking only heightened his imaginary necessity for food. At length, flinging the old jug at the wall, he rose up from his seat resolved to sell his mare. Prudence told him that before long he might have need of her on the road: "Curse the future," he cried, in reply.

He limped to the stable, with his hat wrong side forward over his eyes, and his stick in his hand. The mare had been neglected since Slink gave her a parting feed, and whinnied as he flung the doors back. "Get over," he growled, hitting her on the flank savagely; the mare obeyed, whisking her tail and showing the white of her eyes. He determined to leave the saddle for another day, and having untied the halter from the ring on the manger, he gave the rope a jerk to turn the mare. She was unused to such neglect and rough treatment in the stable, and turned with so little care as to bang Barnabas rudely against the side of the stable. Exasperated by this addition to the morning's wrongs, he lifted his stick, and clenching his teeth, brought it down with all his force upon her back. A kick, a bound, and a scuffle, and the mare wrenched the halter out of her master's hand, bolted into the yard, and through the open gate into the wide and open park. She was a speck in the distance when Barnabas next caught sight of her.

"The Devil's against me," he said, throwing himself upon the grass.

He would have taken the saddle in the town to sell, but for the superstitious belief that the ill-luck of the day, Friday, would attend him there, and that the saddler, as well as the devil, would be against him. The rain began to fall, but he lay there in dogged indifference until he was wet through, then

shivering with cold he shuffled into the Hall, and sat down beside the beer barrel, where he drank and smoked until about four o'clock. The ale did not make him drunk—it did not even stupefy him, it simply depressed him and made his head ache.

He was so completely wretched that had there been a hanging rope or other ready means of destroying himself at hand, he would have committed suicide. He left the barrel with a curse, and went out again into the air. The rain was still falling heavily, persistently; there was no break in the leaden sky. The ground was soft and spongy, the only sound was the splashing of rain-water and the chattering of sparrows under the eaves; the horizon was veiled with misty clouds.

To stay amid such dismal surroundings would make him mad, he felt, so he limped away from it, down the broad drive and through the sodden lane to the nearest ale-house, where if he found no one to sympathise with him, he should at least have the excitement of quarrelling with the innkeeper when it came to the question of paying for what he had consumed.

When the time came for closing the inn he was turned out, and driven into the middle of the road with a kick from the indignant innkeeper, who had unwisely supplied him with bread and cheese, drink and tobacco to the value of thirteen-pence.

The rain fell still heavily, without intermittence. There was no light.

Now running against a bank, now stumbling into a ditch, now walking forwards without the slightest knowledge of whither his footsteps were leading him, Barnabas by slow steps came to the lodge, which was discovered by the light gleaming through the chinks of the window-shutter. A horrible dread had seized his mind that he should have to enter that Hall and sleep in the dark, for he did not know where the tinder-box was to be found; perhaps his father had stolen that with the other things.

He knocked, and when Jenny replied, he begged her to give him a lantern in the most abject tone he could command. After a few minutes Jenny opened the window and handed him the light.

"I suppose you're afraid to open the door to me," he growled, when he had the lantern in his hand.

"I'm no more afraid of you than I am of a rat; but the rats and you too are best outside," she answered, closing the shutters again.

With the lantern swinging by his side he hobbled up the

drive, never raising his eyes from the ground until he was close by the terrace steps. The terrors of solitude in the home of the man he had murdered were already taking hold of his imagination. He dreaded the awful silence, broken at long intervals by the strange slight sounds which seem inseparable from an old house, and which have no explanation. He dreaded the snatches of sleep that would overpower his senses for awhile, and end with the sudden awakening from a dream so hideous as to defy passive endurance. He dreaded being aroused from forgetfulness by the sputtering of a candle, to find shadows leaping from the floor to the ceiling in the flickering light of a fallen wick.

He paused on the first step to ask himself if it were not wiser to sleep in the empty stable, and then he raised his eyes to the house furtively, and for the first time. There was a light there. Not in the banquetting chamber, but in the room on the other side of the entrance. The lantern rattled as it hung on his quivering finger.

What did the light signify? Had his father and Slink combined, and laid evidence against him, and were the officers of justice come to take him away to gaol? That was the least of his fears; the more terrible were indefinable—a vague, awful apprehension of the unknown conjured up a thousand ghostly figures, grotesque and horrible. But the light was real; it glowed steadily. He could count the bricks in the casement. There was nothing supernatural in the appearance; no figures such as danced before his eyes in the delirium of fear looked out at him, grinning with fleshless chops, beckoning with rotten fingers! And if the dead were not feasting in that house what had he to fear? Not the living. Justice would have followed him to the ale-house and trapped him there, not waited with uncovered light in the Hall for him to run like a fool into an unbaited trap.

"'Tis the pedlar returned," he said to himself, with an effort to convince himself on the point. And why should it not be? Might he not have been detained by the magistrates? That was most probable. Yet it was with trembling steps he ascended to the terrace. He paused to listen; not a sound reached his straining ear. The sot had fallen asleep, he concluded, still he dared not lay his hand upon the door. He stole towards the windows; they were too high from the ground for him to see into the lower part of the room. He went back to the door, and raised his hand as if to turn the handle, then dropped it like a thing of lead by his side. He looked around him. Within the radius of light cast by the candle in his

lantern he saw the black moss upon the grey stone of the terrace, and the rain dropping vertically; beyond—nothing. Should he call the pedlar? His throat was too dry, and his tongue had lost its office. He must do something—enter the house or fly. Fly—whither could he fly? If the dead were in the house, would it let him sleep or rest. . . .

He pursed his lips, whistled low, and listened. He fancied he heard a voice. It gave him courage, for he had caught the pedlar speaking aloud to himself the night before. He whistled again and louder. Certainly a voice spoke. The light upon the casement moved slowly. A dark figure came to the window, but from where he stood Barnabas could see nothing but a break in the light. The figure retired; a door creaked. The lantern fell with a clatter upon the stones at his feet; there was a rushing in his ear as if water were closing over his head. The chain upon the door fell, the bolt grated in the lock, an unseen hand opened the great oak door, and raised a candle high, and under the light of it Barnabas saw standing face to face with him, in the very habit that he wore, Tom Talbot!

With a rattling in his parched throat he fell forward, flat upon the wet stone, like a log.

CHAPTER LV.

PANDORA'S BOX.

WHEN Lady Betty looked from the fortress under the pulpit on the following Sunday morning, she was surprised to see Gerard standing alone in Doctor Blandly's pew. She had seen the Doctor on Saturday morning in perfect health, and was at a loss to account for his absence.

"Why are you alone, Gerard?" she asked, when they met after the service.

"It is by my fault, I fear," he replied. "I was late in leaving town this morning, and believing that Doctor Blandly would go on without me, I came directly to the church, instead of going to him first in the ordinary way. He doubtless has stayed at home waiting for me."

"I was afraid some accident had happened to him, you looked so grave and serious this morning."

"I am not a gay fellow at the best of times," said Gerard.

Lady Betty looked at him with quick suspicion, and asked:

"Are these not the best of times then, Gerard?"

"I think we must go round by the road; the heavy rains of this past miserable week must have made the meadow impassable."

"Let it be the road," she answered, and they walked on in silence until they were clear of the homeward-wending congregation, she glancing furtively now and again at him, then pressing his arm a little closer to her side, she said: "Tell me what is the matter, Gerard."

"Mr. Kemble has read the first act of my comedy and condemned it."

"Is that all?" cried Lady Betty, with a laugh. "Why, then, be gay. Merit has ever to face the spite of envy."

"But Mr. Kemble is neither envious nor spiteful. 'Twas with pain he gave me his honest criticism to save me from greater disappointment and waste of time."

"Granted he be honest in his opinion, what then? 'Tis but the opinion of one man, as likely to be mistaken as another. Were we not all charmed with your work when you read it to us under the apple-tree? do you think Doctor Blandly would flatter? do you think I am insincere?"

"God forbid! 'Tis because you are sincere in your friendship that I cannot take your judgment as unbiassed."

"And if 'tis so, why should you be discouraged? Say that the act has less merit than we believe, and more faults than Mr. Kemble, with all his generous amity, can point out, 'tis but the fifth part of your comedy, and your comedy is but a fractional part of that which your brain contains. If we were judged by single efforts, the ablest of mankind might be debased, the feeblest exalted. Do we judge Shakespeare by the first few pages that he wrote?"

"Dear girl, would you have me put on wings, and fly to a height from which the fall must break me?"

"But you have genius to sustain you. You took up the pen, feeling that you could write, and that consciousness should be your assurance."

"I took up the pen by necessity, and learnt too late that poets are born, not made. I am not a poet: I am—nothing!"

The tone of despondency in which he spoke was stronger than argument; it forced Lady Betty to doubt her own judgment. She was silent for some seconds, then she said:

"Gerard, you told me one Sunday that I gave you strength and courage to persevere; do you remember?"

"Perfectly, and 'tis true. If I have wrote one worthy line, 'twas in a happy moment which you had made hopeful."

"I have not altered, why should my influence fail? Let

me inspire you with yet greater hope. 'Tis my dearest wish to help you, to be of womanly service to you, to hold the cup to your lips, and brighten your existence by all the means I have."

Gerard felt his heart stirred, and his blood running quicker through his veins as he listened to these affectionate words and looked into the girl's sweet earnest face. He thought how admirable she was, how weak he.

"You put me to the blush," he said; "I am ashamed of my faint heart."

"'Tis diffidence alone," said she; "your only fault is in setting too high a value on the careless or partial criticism of this Mr. Kemble. And who is he? a player, forsooth! who judges a play by the scope it affords his powers."

"'Tis not a careless criticism; he pointed out a hundred defects which I perceive are real."

"And I," cried Lady Betty, "will point out a thousand merits which you shall not be able to deny. After dinner we will go through the manuscript together while Doctor Blandly sleeps."

"'Tis burnt."

"No matter; I do believe I remember every word that you have wrote and read. I will recall the passages, and you shall write them."

"Lady Betty, you shall not waste your labours on a fruitless task. Give me your help and sympathy in achieving that which is within the power of an ordinary man, and we shall both succeed, you in holding me to my purpose, I in gaining the fair reward for my work."

"Why, that is well said, Gerard. Men do not live by writing plays alone. There are many honourable means of rising to eminence and fortune beside the stage. A poet's rank is not the noblest. Oh, you are wise and right. 'Tis only a woman who would attempt with pertinacious obstinacy to obtain a position for which Nature unfitted her. And poets! what are they, Gerard? Lazy and indolent as a rule, careless in their persons, untidy in their habits. I wouldn't have you look less like a gentleman for all the adulation in the world. Then playwrights, again! Dear heart! what a life they lead! 'Tis said they drink and die prematurely; and the people they meet and speak to, and get to like behind the scenes! You would have lost your delicacy, you would have seen me but seldom, and then only to make me regret. I'm best pleased you have renounced the idea of writing plays for a profession; not that my opinion is altered in the least."

Gerard could only listen and love.

"You could have wrote a play as good as any of Mr. Garrick's, that's certain," she continued. "You can write for your own amusement and our pleasure; your theatre shall be the garden lawn, your audience good old Doctor Blandly and myself, with Mr. Baxter for a critic: his snore will be your only censure, unless you make the hero too bold. But you shall work for some higher end than the amusement of the idle. Couldn't you be an astronomer? There is something majestic in that study, and astronomers live to a great age. They seem to me almost as grand as patriarchs, and I never heard of one falling into bad habits."

"I fear it's a poor business in a lucrative sense. It would pay a man better to find five shillings than a new planet."

"Are you laughing at me?" Lady Betty asked, reproachfully.

"Laughing at you?" cried he, looking down with tumultuous emotion into her simple-wise, beautiful, grave face. "You dear! I could worship you for my god!"

He had taken her hand, and as he spoke he pressed it fiercely, and his ardent gaze seemed to scorch her very soul.

The blood left her face, she drew her hand from his and turned her eyes away with a frightened look. It struck her with the force of a sudden discovery that Gerard loved her, and loved her as a brother may not.

She walked to Doctor Blandly's gate without one word. Her silence contrasted oddly with her previous volubility. Gerard seemed equally embarrassed. His love was a secret no longer. Did he regret that a sudden accession of passion had overcome his habitual reserve? No.

The barrier was broken down, and the forces of love and passion took possession of his soul, sweeping reason and prudential considerations before them as they rushed from restraint.

"If she will let me hope to make her my wife," he said to himself, "what difficulty will be insurmountable? Position, money, whatsoever is necessary to her happiness, I will obtain, if she blesses me with that one encouragement."

And for this encouragement he prepared to ask her, when dinner should be finished, and Doctor Blandly taking his customary doze.

CHAPTER LVI.

GERARD TURNS HIS FACE TO THE WALL.

"My dear," said Doctor Blandly, after greeting Lady Betty, "when you have removed your bonnet and tippet, you will come and drink a glass of Madeira with me in the front room; our dinner will be a little later than usual to-day."

On Sunday dinner was generally served at half-past one punctually, in order that Jerry and Kate might profit by the Reverend John Baxter's afternoon service; the present departure from that rule made no impression upon Lady Betty, whose thoughts were troubled by the recent discovery she had made of Gerard's feeling towards her. She ran upstairs to her room, and sat there for full five minutes in deep thought before commencing to make her toilette.

Meanwhile Doctor Blandly led Gerard into the front room, and insisted upon his drinking Madeira. Gerard was excited, and declared he felt no need of refreshment.

"Drink that, all the same," said the Doctor.

Gerard tossed off the glass with a laugh, and then said:

"I am afraid I have been the cause of your staying at home this morning, Sir."

"No, my boy; I have had visitors, and my time has been fully engaged—a remarkable thing for me, you will say. 'Tis true, a remarkable thing has occurred—a thing unexpected by me and by you."

"Something has happened to Barnabas," said Gerard quickly.

"'Tis true. Will you have another glass of Madeira?"

"No; I can hear anything you have to tell me. Is he dead?"

"I will tell you all that has happened, Come with me into the garden. Lady Betty will be here presently, and you must know at once."

Gerard followed Doctor Blandly into the garden, impatient for a confirmation of his suspicions, and to tell the truth, of his hopes; for if Barnabas were dead, the Talbot estate would be his, and he should be able to offer Lady Betty something more than an empty hand. A young countryman in a worn livery was at the foot of the garden steps. Doctor Blandly whispered a word to him, and he, touching his hat, walked sharply down the garden, past the hedge and wicket, and into the kitchen-garden beyond.

"In the first place, Gerard," said the Doctor, touching the

young man's arm, "I have seen the father of your half-brother Barnabas; he came yesterday, and offered to swear his paternity, and reveal the fraud put upon your father."

"That would put me in possession of my father's estate, and clear his name from disgrace."

"So I thought, and I bade the man come to-morrow to know if you would buy his services. But listen, he had no sooner gone than I learnt a still more important fact. You saw the young fellow to whom I just now spoke?"

"The country servant."

"He is a foolish and dense, but, in the main, honest lad. He has served Barnabas—partly compelled by fear, partly cheated by a mistaken idea of gratitude. He detailed the circumstance of Tom's disappearance. Tom was thrown from his horse, and while he lay stunned upon the ground, Barnabas shot him. At the same moment, Tom's horse, in struggling to rise, kicked Barnabas, breaking his leg. Unable to remount, and fancying he heard the sound of approaching voices, he called for assistance to the lad—Toby Slink, whom he had placed in ambush near at hand. Slink carried him into an adjacent corn-field, and in obedience to his threats and command, returned to the towpath to throw Tom's body into the river."

"As he laid his hand on Tom's arm, your brother opened his eyes. The fall had stunned him; the bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his arm. When the lad recovered from his fright, he went down on his knees, and prayed to Tom to forgive him, acknowledging the part he had been sent to play. Tom was weak from the loss of blood, still bewildered by the blow, and knew that he was at the lad's mercy. He had no reason to suspect the identity of Barnabas, and no suspicion of what would result from his disappearance, so he promised the lad to hide for a fair month, giving him a chance of escaping from his master, and avoiding the punishment Barnabas had vowed to inflict if his orders were not carried out successfully. For Tom had left London with the intention of staying aloof from Lady Betty until his unreasonable jealousy was cured, and here was a means which he thought——"

"How do you know what Tom thought?" Gerard asked, turning deadly pale.

"Because he has told me. He is at the bottom of the garden at this moment, as hale and hearty, thank God, as ever he was."

Gerard dropped his chin upon his breast, and murmured—

"I also *should* thank God."

"And you will, dear lad, when this momentary pang of

loss has passed," said the Doctor tenderly. "For He who did most sacrifice, has said that 'tis more blessed to give than to receive."

With an effort Gerard seemed to free himself from regretful reflection, as, raising his head quickly, he looked down the garden towards that part where his brother waited.

"Go to him, Gerard," said the Doctor; "I hear Betty's voice."

They separated after a silent grasp of hands—Doctor Blandly going into the house, Gerard through the wicket, and down the fresh-scented vegetable-garden. The brothers met and embraced, after the fashion of that time, but in silence, and then they sat down side by side on the bench where Doctor Blandly was wont to sit and admire his healthy cabbages and bright scarlet beans.

"Where is my Betty, Gerard?" Tom asked, in a low, eager voice.

"In the house still, with Doctor Blandly."

"I hunger to see her sweet face again; the Doctor tells me that she is looking thinner and paler than she did."

"She has suffered, Tom, and for love of you."

"Poor soul! poor child! Dear sweetheart! She shall smile from this day, she shall laugh and dance and sing, and not a grave thought shall come to her of my making. You will see the bright life stream into her face like colour to the opening bud, Gerard; you shall see her more happy than the bird upon the bough there; so that it will do your heart good to look upon her."

"Yes, yes," Gerard answered.

"The Doctor has told me of her courage, her independence, her fidelity and trust, outdoing my imagination, and shaming my hopes as all too mean and contracted. Walk with me, Gerard, I cannot sit still. Great God, how abundant are thy blessings!"

Gerard rose and walked by his side, glad of any change that would help him to conceal his feelings.

"'Tis all incredible!" continued Tom. "To think that when I saw you last, sitting beside Lady Betty in your chariot the morning of our due! I was a hopeless fallen wretch, standing hid amongst the shrubs, putting an ill construction upon her smiles and gaiety."

"Poor soul—she was half-mad for joy that you had escaped."

"I know it. I have felt sure that it was so in my reasonable moments, but then I was mad with jealousy and shame, and

could be just to no one. I felt myself then alone in the world despised, laughed at, loveless, and now I find that I am loved as never man was loved before, I think. My Betty, my wife!"

"She has ever thought of you as her husband."

"Blandly has told me so, and of her love for you because you were my brother. Truth—love has driven that joy from my remembrance. 'Tis not alone I find a wife, but a brother too. Give me your hand, brother—both. You also have done brave things. I am told you have writ a play."

"A worthless play as it proves—Mr. Kemble has damned it."

"Then damn Mr. Kemble in return. Pshaw! you shall do better than write plays for a grudging remuneration; you shall see 'em for your pleasure, Gerard: one half of all I have is yours, all if you will, so that I have my Betty."

"Then you would be the richer, Tom."

"Aye, that I should, a hundredfold. We will live together, hunt together, fetch long walks, and live as brothers should. We will share a happiness in common, and when we find a suitable wife for you—some sweet, good girl——"

He broke off suddenly, for his ear caught above the sound of his own voice a faint cry:

"Tom—my love!"

Lady Betty had run across the lawn, had reached the wicket by the hedge, and then hearing his well-remembered voice, her strength failed her, and she held by the gate, her knees trembling beneath her, crying and sobbing so that for awhile she could make no articulate sound.

At her cry he came, and seeing him she tottered forward with a little scream, and would have fallen but that he caught her up in his arms and held her to his heart. And then she pressed her lips to his, and swooned away with the ecstasy of her joy.

Gerard turned his face to the wall.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE OMEN.

THE company did spare justice to the excellent dinner prepared by old Kate. The lovers were impatient of the moments that kept their hands and eyes asunder; Doctor Blandly was excited; and every morsel that he forced himself to take seemed to choke Gerard. For Lady Betty's peace he was

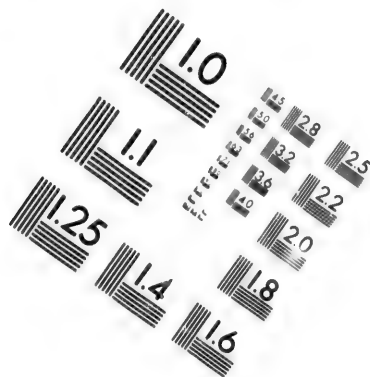
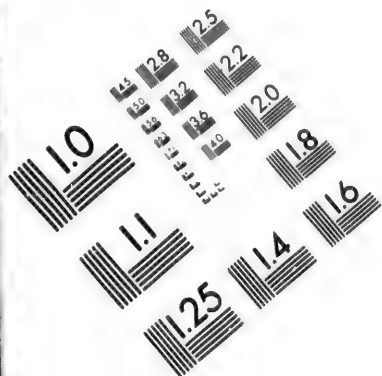
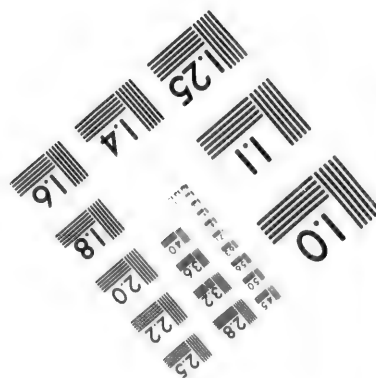
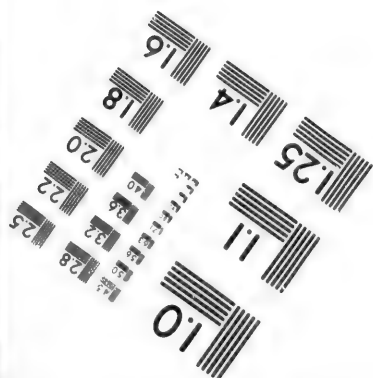
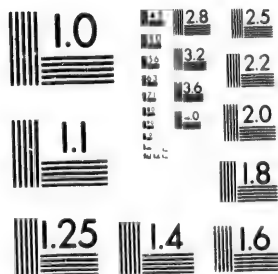


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)



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bound to be there, though for his own he would fain have been alone in a desert.

After dinner, Doctor Blandly mercifully despatched him with a note to Mr. Baxter, and instructions to bring the parson back to share in the general happiness, while he, with many apologies for the infirmity of his old age, ensconced himself in his elbow-chair, and did his utmost to sleep as usual. He may have failed, but what took place between the lovers was concealed from his sight by the yellow silk handkerchief.

During the afternoon Jerry brought up the best that his master's cellar contained, and under the influence of the wine the Reverend John Baxter and Doctor Blandly became excessively merry.

Lady Betty's spirits mounted also, but her gaiety was hysterical, and towards evening, in the midst of a peal of laughter, she caught sight of Gerard's face, and as suddenly burst into a flood of tears.

Doctor Blandly came to her side, and when he had calmed her he insisted upon her going to bed. She did not refuse to use the spare chamber, and soon after Mr. Baxter returned to the Vicarage with an explanation for his wife.

The brothers and Doctor Blandly sat together and talked.

"What has become of my half-brother, Barnabas?" Gerard asked.

"Ah, I have that part of my history to tell you," replied Tom. "When I returned to the Hall, the first thing I did was to frighten old Blake nearly out of his wits. He is an egotist, and having come to the conclusion that I had been murdered by Barnabas, I believe his dignity was hurt by seeing me alive."

"He is a conceited old fool," said the Doctor.

"But a faithful servant, so we will forgive him his faults. When I had reconciled him to the fact of entertaining a wrong conviction, he told me of the life Barnabas has led as the master of Talbot Hall. A most wretched, miserable existence it must have been."

"Vice and happiness are as far asunder as love and hate," said Doctor Blandly, sententiously.

"Deserted by everyone, the unhappy man had left the Hall. Blake knew not why, possibly to find relief from solitude in the nearest inn. When we went up to the house we could find no one, but as I wished to see him I sat down to wait for his return. I heard from the steward all that had happened. The light faded and we lit candles. When Blake had nothing more to tell, he fell asleep. The rain fell pitilessly, and as I sat there listening to the perpetual dripping, I fancied what the

condition of a guilty wretch would be, deserted and alone in that old hall, and I commiserated the man who had attempted my life."

"A mistake, Tom, a mistake," said the Doctor; "commiserate the unfortunate, if you will, but whip all rogues, I say."

"You may say that, Doctor; but your practice would be most merciful. For what are rogues but unfortunate? Have you not said that vice and happiness are wide asunder?"

"Go on with your facts, Tom. You can philosophise better when you are older."

"When the monotony was becoming insupportable, I heard a sound outside. I roused Blake. We listened, and soon after a faint whistle reached our ears. I went to the window, and looking out caught sight of a lantern by the terrace steps. Blake took a candle, and we went into the entrance-hall. He was fearful, and standing well behind the door, pulled it open and raised the light that I might see who was without. There was a shock upon the stone pavement like the fall of a tile from the roof, and taking the candle from Blake I found, stretched at full length, the man who had attempted my life—Barnabas, to appearance dead. We got him into the hall, and after awhile, when he showed signs of returning consciousness, I withdrew, leaving him to Blake's rough mercy. What means he took to assure him that he had nothing to fear from me I can't tell."

"If Blake's the man I take him for he promised him nothing short of hanging, I'll be bound," said Doctor Blandly.

"That is not unlikely, for as soon as Barnabas had recovered his strength he knocked the old man down, and fled from the Hall, whither it is impossible to say. The outbuildings were all closed, the rain fell in a torrent the whole night, it was pitch dark, and the unhappy wretch was lame. He did not return to the Hall.

"In the morning Blake wished to have the woods beat, and to hunt him out like a fox, but as this might have driven him to some deplorable act of desperation, I forbade any search to be made beyond the outbuildings and park-sweep. I waited about the Hall until late in the afternoon, hoping he would return, for in the course of the day I learnt from the innkeeper near that he had no money, and I expected that hunger would force him to come back to the Hall. However, I had seen no sign of him when I quitted Sevenoaks yesterday evening, I left orders that food should be put in the hall, and the doors left open, and that he should be unmolested."

"Thank you, Tom, for your forbearance," said Gerard; "I

have wished him dead again and again, but he is my mother's son, and I would not have him die a shameful death."

"God forbid!" said Doctor Blandly. "'Tis a barbarous and a mischievous thing to publicly kill a man in infamy. The proper end of punishment is to correct and deter, and for a rogue like Barnabas, death is no punishment at all. The scaffold makes heroes of contemptible villains. Punish rascals, I say again, despite Master Tom's merciful outcry, but punish them in a manner that shall teach them the policy of living decently."

"You shall tell us, Doctor, how we are to punish him, for I confess 'tis a question that perplexes me," said Tom.

The Doctor knitted his brows, pursed up his lips, and took a deliberate pinch of snuff before replying; then he said:

"I would just pay his passage to America or another of our colonies, and give the captain a round sum to be handed to him for his necessities when he is set ashore."

"And the whipping you suggested?" Tom asked, slyly.

"You can promise him that if ever he shows his face in England again. I take it that what with fright, starvation, a broken leg, and exposure to the rain of Friday night, he has had as much corporal punishment as his constitution can support; 'tis his conscience that must chastise him henceforth."

As neither of the brothers could suggest any improvement upon Doctor Blandly's proposed dealing with Barnabas, it was determined between them that the following day they should post to Sevenoaks, find Barnabas, and make terms with him for quitting the country.

When Lady Betty woke, the morning was yet grey. She slipped from her white nest, and running across to the window drew back a corner of the blind. She looked down into the garden. Tom was there; it was not too early for a lover to be up. Making a frame with the blind, she showed him her smiling face, closed her red lips and parted them; he seemed to understand the pantomime, and recklessly tearing a rose which Doctor Blandly would have grudgingly nipped with careful scissors, he threw it up upon her window-sill in response. In an incredibly short space of time she dressed, and with his flower in her bosom ran down, and gave up her still sweeter, tenderer face to his lips.

He put his arm about her and she clasped his hand, and in that position they walked round the garden dozens of times, looking at the flowers but not thinking of them; feeling the utmost happiness but saying very little, perhaps because all words seemed too prosaic to express the poetry of their love.

"We are not talking much," she said after awhile, with a little laugh.

"I do love you so, darling, that I cannot think of indifferent matters readily, I love you, that is all my tongue will say."

"Tis enough, dear," she answered.

She was right, perhaps; but after awhile he felt it necessary to say something else.

"You have more colour in your sweet cheeks this morning," said he, "did you sleep well?"

"Too well. I said to myself when I closed my eyes—'I will dream of Tom, or I will not sleep at all;' but my eyes closed, and I don't remember dreaming anything pretty—only a lot of confused rubbish that was not worth dreaming about at all. Now what *did* I dream?—Oh!" she stopped suddenly, with a frightened look.

"Something terrible?"

"I dreamt that I lost a tooth."

Tom burst into a hearty laugh, but Lady Betty looked grave.

"You little goose," he cried, "are you vexed because you did not dream of cupids and roses?"

"No, but do you know what that signifies?"

"Not in the least, unless it be that dreams going by contraries, you will shortly cut your wisdom tooth, sweet."

"Don't laugh, Tom; I believe in dreams."

"So do I, when they are pleasantly realised. And what is the significance of yours?"

"I shall lose a friend."

"Why that may be true enough, for you will lose me for a whole day."

"Where are you going, dear?" she asked with anxiety.

Tom told briefly the arrangement he had made with Gerard to seek Barnabas.

"You are going to find the man who tried to take your life!" she exclaimed. "Oh, if you love me, dear, don't leave me."

She was so earnest that Tom became grave. Women and men with greater wisdom than Lady Betty believed at that time in signs and omens, and however absurd they may have appeared to Tom, he saw nothing ridiculous in the fear of his sweetheart for his safety.

"Dear love," said he, "we are nowhere safe from accident; and if there be truth in omens, 'tis well to take their lightest interpretation. What will the loss be then but our separation for a day?"

"Are you obliged to go, dear?" Lady Betty asked, the subject not being one for argument.

"Be sure 'tis necessity that takes me away from you, love."

"There is danger—will you not stay with me if I ask you?"

"Yes. I will do anything you bid me do; but I do not think Lady Betty will ask her husband to forego a duty for the sake of safety."

"Kiss me, love, and forgive me forgetting your honour. Do what *you* will, brave darling, and heed me not. I am nothing but a little woman — with a woman's love and fear. . . . There! now I will not say another word to hinder your purpose."

CHAPTER LVIII.

A STURDY ROGUE.

"JERRY," said Doctor Blandly, when the old servant brought him his customary tankard at breakfast, "you will see that the two saddle horses are ready at 'The Bell' by half-past ten."

"I'll go round if you please, Sir, and give the hostler a good talking to at once."

"Do; then take this letter to Mr. Baxter; and afterwards find the constable, and tell him to be here about ten o'clock."

Jerry departed at once to execute these commissions, and Doctor Blandly explained the little comedy that would probably be played before Tom and Gerard left.

As ten o'clock struck, Barney O'Crewe rang the bell, and thoughtfully stroking his scrubby chin, went over for the last time those delicate points which would come under discussion in the forthcoming interview with Doctor Blandly.

"The top o' the mornun to you, squoire," he said as Jerry opened the gate and admitted him. "Is the Docthor widin, if ye plase?"

"I shouldn't let you in if he wasn't," answered Jerry, fastening the gate.

"I'm deiloighted to foind ye as agrable and complaisint as usual: an' if I can putt a word in for yewid the master, I will, be sure, squoire."

Jerry made no reply, but led the way into the house, and opening the door of the breakfast-room, introduced the pedlar.

The breakfast things were still upon the table. Doctor Blandly sat at the head, with Tom on one side of him and the Reverend John Baxter on the other. Lady Betty seated beside Tom, rested her right hand lightly upon the table, her left, lost to sight, was locked in his; opposite to her, and with his back towards the door, sat Gerard.

"Me service to ye, me lady, and to you, Doethor Blandly, and to your riverince, and likewise to you, gentlemen," said the pedlar, with a bow to each. "It seems that the owle man has played an onsamely trick upon me, Doethor, to bring me here, where ye sit surrounded by the quality on both sides of ye."

"No; he obeyed my orders. We are all friends of Mr. Talbot," Doctor Blandly replied, with a motion of his hand towards Tom.

"Mr. Gerard, Sor, I salutes ye wid all the respect in the world." The pedlar bowed again to Tom. "Shure I knowed ye the vary moment I clapped eyes on ye, for yer the vary image of your swate mother—the saints in heaven bless her sowl."

"I have given Mr. Talbot your narrative of Saturday, but in case I have omitted any particular, it will be well for you to repeat what you told me for our general satisfaction," said Doctor Blandly.

"And I should be proud to do that same, Doethor; but ye must know I've a tremenjous objection to spaking in public. I can contrive to spake in private; but I'm so modest and bashful that I could niver get out a word before such a collection of the quality."

"I don't ask you to say anything which will affect your negotiation with Mr. Gerard; all that I desire is that you will repeat the statement you made relative to the attack upon Mr. Thomas Talbot—which I understood you to say you had sworn before a magistrate."

"Sure it's thrue, every word of it, and I've sworn it upon the Horly Bible before the magistrate, as ye say, though for the loife of me I don't remember the name of 'un at this minute."

"That is what I wish you to state now. Afterwards, if Mr. Talbot pleases, you can privately make terms for any further revelations that are necessary."

"Doctor Blandly expresses my wish," said Tom. "Before I enter into any negotiation with you I must have particulars of the murder committed by Slink."

"Y'are roight, dear Mr. Gerard, y'are quite roight to take your precautions, for y'are not supposed to know but what I'm the greatest scoundrel goun. And sure if 'tis only to tell you all about the murtherin varmint, Slink, I can overcome my nat'ral hesitation." The pedlar cleared his throat, and looking at the good things upon the table with a longing eye, said: "Doethor, will ye give me a taste o' wather to give me courage and moisten my lips?"

"You may take some water, there is a glass and the bottle."

With a wry face O'Crewe poured out about a spoonful of water in the glass, which he raised to his lips and set down again with the remark, that it was a "moighty onpleasant flavour" the water had in these parts; and then with all the effrontery of a Newgate pleader, he repeated in substance the story he had told to Doctor Blandly, but with many rhetorical flourishes and eloquent additions, for the old man was vain of his ability, and only too proud to make a display before a cultivated audience. He addressed himself chiefly to Tom, under the impression that he was Gerard, but pathetic passages he delivered looking at Lady Petty, as when he described the "swate smoile that dwelt on the young murdered gentleman's face as he looked up to the blessed stars above 'um," and when, in conclusion, he called upon the saints in Heaven to witness that he had no object but to prove the holy truth, he directed his glance to the Reverend John Baxter.

"Perhaps we can prove the truth without troubling the saints," said Doctor Blandly, drily, as he touched the bell.

O'Crewe opened his eyes in astonishment. Jerry entered.

"Tell the constable to bring the young man here," said Doctor Blandly.

The constable presently appeared leading Slink by the arm.

"Do you know who that is?" asked Doctor Blandly.

"Do I know who it is? I should think I did! Sorra a one better. 'Tis the murtherin varmint, Slink himself, wid just the same bloodthirsty expression in the face of 'um he had when I see 'um a dragging that swate blessed Misther Tom into the cowl'd, cowl'd river!"

Slink grinned from ear to ear.

"Don't laugh, ye murtherin' villain, ye'll not escape the vingeance of the law. I know ye at once, though I nivir saw yer face but twice in my loife."

"You have a good memory for features," said Doctor Blandly; "do you remember the face of Mr. Thomas Talbot?"

"Nothun better; I shall never forget the expression of 'um to my dyun day. He was not like you, Mr. Gerard, for ye've got the faitures of your mother, and Mr. Tom tuk afther the owld admiral."

At this assertion Slink was attacked with such a fit of laughter that he had to bend his body at a right angle with his legs, and stamp his feet before he could fetch breath. In a less demonstrative fashion the rest of the company seemed also amused.

"Sor!" exclaimed O'Crewe, addressing Doctor Blandly, and

drawing himself up with an air of offended dignity, "wad ye be koind enough to explain the manin' o' that dirty black-gyrd's behavior?"

"The explanation is this," said Tom, "my name is Thomas Talbot."

"Mr. Thomas! and not dead at all? Thank the powers!" said O'Crewe, with ready wit. "I'm rejoiced to see you lookun so well, Sor, an' it plases me moightily to foind that I've been makun a mistake all the while."

"But it doesn't please me," cried the Doctor; "and if you have sworn a lie you shall be punished for your perjury."

"Sure, and that was a mistake too, Docthor dear. D'ye think I'd swear the life away of a charmun young innocent country lad? divil a bit! I never swore, nothun at all, at all." As he spoke the pedlar edged away from the constable towards the door.

"Wait," said the Reverend John Baxter; "there's one thing that there is no mistake about. You have tried to impose on us with a false and scandalous assertion."

"Sure, your riverence, that was the greatest mistake of all."

"And one that you shall have the opportunity of repenting. Constable, you will take this man and lock up his feet in the stocks until sundown. Give him as much water as he can drink, and no more bread than he can pay for—off with him for a sturdy rogue."

CHAPTER LIX.

FAREWELL.

CHANGING horses twice upon the road, Tom and Gerard reached Talbot Hall about five o'clock in the afternoon. Old Blake came to the gate.

"He's about, Sir—he's about," he said, in a low voice. "He was seen yesterday, and I caught sight of him again this morning. Shall I fetch my gun and come up to the house with you?"

Tom laughed. "Do you think we need protection against a poor lame devil such as he? Open the gate, and come up to us in half-an-hour, and not before."

Blake shook his head, and reluctantly opened the gate for the two gentlemen to pass.

"Go on, Gerard; I will overtake you in a couple of minutes. It has just struck me that Slink's sweetheart is dying to know

his fate," Tom said, pulling up when they were half-dozen yards from the lodge. He turned his horse and walked back, while Gerard, waiting for him, cast his eyes over the wide spread of lawn, and along the terrace before the house. Not a living thing was to be seen.

Half-way up the long drive there was on either side a clump of evergreens; they were the only places of concealment between the lodge and the house. As he was looking at them, a rabbit hopped out from the clump on the right-hand side into the gravelled path, and standing on his hind legs with his ears cocked, regarded him for a moment, then leisurely hopped over towards the left-hand clump. Just as it reached the turf, it stopped suddenly, and then with a sharp turn from the evergreens, it flew off towards the woods as fast as it could lay its heels to the ground. Why, if it were frightened, did it not seek shelter in the thickly-planted covert? Gerard asking himself the question, shifted his horse from the right to the left-hand side of the path, as Tom with a nod to the girl he had been making happy with a few kind words, trotted away from the lodge, and came to his brother's side.

"What do you think of the Hall, Gerard?"

"'Tis a fine building."

"One wing is closed altogether; the other needs repair. A few rooms in the centre are the only really habitable ones at present. But we will alter all that. We will go over the whole place and arrange together what changes will be necessary to make it a pleasant home. What are you looking at, Gerard?"

"This is a noble lawn, Tom."

"Oh, 'tis the lawn you are looking at. I thought you had caught sight of game in the covert. There are deer in the park, and when they come upon the lawn, they add to the prettiness of the picture; but a sweet wife on the terrace, and children stretching their pretty arms out to welcome us, are wanting to make it perfect——"

"May nothing be wanting to complete your happiness."

"Nor yours, Gerard. I see nothing of that unhappy man, do you?"

"Nothing," said Gerard.

They had passed the clumps, Gerard riding between that on the left and Tom, and were now close at the house. They dismounted, and having hitched their reins upon the iron scroll-work at the foot of the terrace steps, they entered the house by the open door.

Tom threw open the door of the dining-room. It was empty;

upon the table were scraps of broken food, an overturned pitcher, and a dirty glass half full of stale ale. They examined room after room, and finding no one, went out beyond the shrubberies into the stables; they also were deserted. Here they were joined by Blake.

"Where are the horses?" asked Tom.

"I've had 'em removed, Sir," replied the steward. For you see, Sir, this Mr.—Mr. Crewe, I think he's called, lost his'n, and I thought he might take a fancy to breaking a lock, and taking one of yourn, Sir. Lord, Sir, 'taint no good looking about for him in there. He's as scary as a hunted fox. When I see him this morning he was eating food a-standing in the hall-doorway, to make sure he shouldn't be trapped—he's as wild as a Bedlamite. This was the stall where he kep' his horse, and that his saddle."

"Come into the house, Gerard. Blake, send something to eat and drink up to my room. What can you give us?"

Discussing the question of refreshment, Tom and the steward walked out of the stable. Gerard following them, stepped aside quickly to the hanging saddle and put his hand into the holsters: they were empty.

The room chosen by Tom for his use was above the entrance, and looked down upon the terrace. They sat near the window and ate, and when the meal was finished they walked round the Hall and along the terrace until the light faded, then they returned to the chamber, having seen nothing of Barnabas. Rain was beginning to fall again.

"Gerard, we must put an end to that poor wretch's sufferings to-morrow. It is terrible to think of him wandering about half-starved in this atrocious weather, without shelter or a single comfort in the world. If he is wild with fear, as Blake makes out he is, we are not likely to get within speaking distance of him unless we take measures for catching him. That will not be a difficult task with the servants to help us, as he is lame; but one has a natural repugnance to hunting a human creature as one would a beast."

"True; yet, as you say, he must not be suffered to exist in his present manner, and if we cannot find a better method before the morning, that must be adopted."

"I am anxious on your account, as well as his. 'Tis preying on your mind, Gerard, to an extreme. I understand how you must feel upon the subject, but I confess your depression astonishes me. You have known him long for a scoundrel, and thought him your brother. 'Tis some satisfaction to know that his father was not yours."

"I feel that, Tom; and admit that the balance of fortune has lately turned in my favour."

"Then why shouldn't you be of better cheer? The future is not unpleasant to you: we shall share everything, and you will find me eager to catch your wishes and fall in with them."

"I know, I know," Gerard said, pressing the hand his brother held out to him.

"You have no secret grief, hey, brother? I never knew anyone so utterly dejected, except myself, when I fancied that my mistress despised me. You have lost a sweetheart, have you?"

"A sweetheart," Gerard said, with a dry laugh. "Did you ever hear of me loving a woman, do you think a woman could love me, an ex-gamester, brother to a murdering villain, a man who succeeds at fleecing fools at cards and fails in the first honest work to which he set his hand? The most that an angel can do is to pity me."

"'Tis but the thought of to-day, Gerard. A year—six months—aye, less than that, of companionship with pleasant folks, will change your bitter reflections upon the past to sweet hopes of a future. I shall take my wife to Italy while the alterations are being made here, and you shall come with us, and if my sweet Betty's lively happiness does not drive away your care, I will suffer you to build a cell and live in it like a hermit."

Gerard turned away in silence.

"Well, well, think what you will," said Tom, "time shall show. Fill your glass, and when the bottle is empty we will turn into bed. Will you share my room, or take the next?"

"I'll take the next, for the sake of having my own sweet company to myself."

"As you will, Gerard."

"I'll say good-night now. Is the library door unlocked?"

"Yes."

"I shall read for an hour. Good-night, Tom."

"God bless you, Gerard."

CHAPTER LX.

IN THE LIBRARY.

THE library, like all the principal rooms in Talbot Hall, looked out upon the terrace. The shutters were unclosed, and the

heavy curtains looped up. The light of the candle lit by Gerard could be seen from the lawn.

Gerard sat with his legs crossed and his hands clasped over his knee for full half-an-hour in thought; then he rose, took the first book that his hand touched, and opening it in the middle, read. He raised his head and listened, catching a faint sound from the outside; but the swinging of a lantern and a heavy regular tread growing distinct, he dropped his eyes again. The outer door was opened, and someone tapped at the library door.

"Come in," he said.

Blake entered, his collar up, a stream of water falling from his hat as he removed it.

"Beg your pardon, Sir, is Mr. Thomas here?" he asked.

"No; he is in the room upstairs."

"No light in the window, Sir."

"Then he is asleep, or, at least, in bed."

"Any orders for the morning, Sir?"

"Tell one of the stable lads to have a horse ready as soon as it is light."

"Right, Sir. The lad shall sleep in the stable, and when you want the horse—if you'll just give him a call—his name's Jacob, Sir."

"Very well. Good-night."

"Beg your pardon, Sir, shall I show you how to fasten the front door?"

"No, I understand that."

"That's everything, Sir. I only mentioned it because I see something like a figure round the shrubbery in the dusk, and, —"

Gerard nodded, and returning to his book, closed further discussion.

The retreating step of the old steward, and subsequently the heavy step of a stable-help, were the only sounds that broke the silence for a couple of hours; during that time Gerard read page after page of the book on his knee listlessly. He read because he could not sleep and did not want to think.

The wind had risen, and blew the rain in gusty violence against the windows, now in a sharp, momentary dash, and again in a long, pattering volley; but the casements were well secured, and the lights burnt steadily by Gerard's side. After a long pelting of heavy drops against the glass, the wind turned, and there was a lull in the stormy brunt. In this momentary silence, a grating sound fell upon Gerard's ear, and simultaneously the flame of the candles swept down the wax and leapt up, confusing the printed lines under his eye. Had

the wind blown open the front door? It was hardly possible; the steward had closed it carefully, and tried it afterwards with his knee.

Yet clearly the wind had entered by some opening; Gerard felt the damp chill of it upon his face. He raised his eyes from the page to the library door. He could not see it distinctly for the light that fell between. He moved the candelabra further back, then replaced his hand upon the book, keeping his eyes upon the door-latch, and moving not a muscle. Presently he saw the latch rise and slowly descend as the door moved beyond the catch. Little by little the door moved forward upon its hinges, and the opening gradually yawned. Suddenly it flew back, and in the uncertain light Gerard distinguished Barnabas bringing up a pistol to the level of his head.

Gerard sat as motionless as a statue. He might have been dead already, but for the reflected light in his eyes, and that he spoke:

"Barnabas," he said.

Barnabas lowered his pistol, and looking quickly round the room, his finger still upon the trigger, asked hoarsely:

"Where is he?"

"Asleep."

"You spoke just in time. Curse the light, I cannot see. Is he hiding here? Mark me, 'twill be your fault if I am a fratricide, for by God I'll shoot you if he lays a finger upon me in treachery!"

He spoke, looking round the room wildly, and evidently as a warning to Tom if he were in concealment.

"He is not here. If you don't want to wake him, shut the door and speak lower."

"Shut the door! A likely thing, I'm not trapped yet. Speak low! What do I want to say to you? Nothing. What I have to say to him this will tell!" He made a movement with the heavy pistol.

"What good will it do you to shoot him? Are you mad?"

"Nearly. I have been quite. And it was he drove me out of my senses coming before me and standing there in the doorway when I thought he was dead. A fine joke for him, but one that will cost him dear. Let him come, I don't fear him now. The rain and pain, and hunger and thirst have cured me. I've another friend in my pocket, and standing here, in this corner, I fear none of you—my father, Slink, him, you, and all that are plotting to do for me."

He put himself in the corner by the door, and lugged out the

second pistol from his pocket, looking now in the dark behind him, now towards Gerard and the room.

Gerard, becoming more used to the dim light, could mark the appearance of his half-brother. His dress was torn with briars. A great rent in his sleeve exposed his bare forearm and elbow; the rain beating upon his face showed it a ghastly white where it was not covered with a thick, scrubby beard; he had lost his hat, and his hair hung matted about his head, dripping with rain.

"If you are not mad, you are a fool," said Gerard. "If we sought to give you up to the law should we come unarmed to do the work of a constable? Tom Talbot has come here to offer you money and an escape from the country."

"I should be mad or a fool indeed to believe that! Do you think I or anyone else would give money and help to a man who has done his utmost to murder me? And that's what you would have me believe: well, then my answer is you are a liar."

"Think of what I have said, and come again to me in an hour. By that time you will see the folly of supposing that we are here with treacherous intentions."

"Oh, I know your sneaking gentlemanly ways. You who can rob, and cheat, swindle and thieve a rich living with no tools but a pack of cards and a dice-box, have a quicker and surer means of cheating a low rogue like me than I can readily guess at. I know why the doors have been left open, and food put upon the table—to tempt me and trap me like a rat in a cage. I said to myself—these things are not set here for nothing, in a day or two my lord Tom with a sneaking hound or two at his heels will come to play out the farce to a conclusion. I've been waiting for him, and I would have shot him dead this afternoon, for his white coat was a sure mark, but that you, plague you, got between him and me."

"And if you had shot him—what then?"

"What then—the gallows, a brave face, the cheers of the mob, and a sudden death. Isn't that a better end than rotting away year by year in a gaol."

"No one wishes to serve you so."

"You liar!" Barnabas said, grating his teeth. "I've a mind to put a bullet in your pretty body, you sneaking, gentlemanly thief." He trembled with envious hate, and half raised his pistol.

"Go out and reflect on what I have said; I shall sit here until the morning, and will listen to any terms you like to make. But I warn you that you will have no longer than this night

to consider. To-morrow morning we shall name our terms and oblige you to accept them."

"Not while I can lift a pistol. I swear I will hang for the man who has made my life hell to me, and for once I will keep my oath."

At this moment there was a movement above, and Barnabas looked into the darkness with palpable fear. He was like a beast at bay, for whom a sound has more terror than a blow. He was a coward even in his desperation.

Tom's voice above called, "Gerard!"

In a moment Barnabas dashed from his corner, and fled out into the darkness. Gerard heard him stumbling down the terrace steps.

"Gerard," Tom called again.

Gerard made no reply. Tom, too drowsy to make inquiries into the noise that had disturbed him, turned upon his side to sleep and dream. Gerard sat and watched.

And the night wore slowly on.

CHAPTER LXI.

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN
LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS."

GERARD paced up and down the library. He could fix his attention upon the book no longer. From time to time he walked to the window and looked out into the obscurity; once he went out to the door in the entrance-hall, peering to the right and left along the terrace. He could see nothing. He had but slight hope of Barnabas returning, and when at length the outline of the distant woods became vaguely visible, he felt convinced that the resolution Barnabas had made was unalterable. He would surely take Tom's life.

He stood for a few minutes with his hand resting on the table, looking round the room, and he pictured the future. The room glowing with the light of burning logs in the wide chimney; his brother Tom seated there with Lady Betty, his sweet wife, beside him; Doctor Blandly an honoured guest sharing their happiness and content, and little children playing at their mother's feet. There was no vacant chair placed for an expected friend in the picture. With a sigh he turned away and walked to the end of the room, where in the evening they had thrown down their hats and coats.

He took up Tom's light drab riding-coat and drew it on. It was large for him—so much the better for his purpose. When he turned up the collar and buttoned it over it covered the lower half of his face. Then he put on his hat, drawing it down over his eyes. Thus dressed, even in the light he might have been mistaken for his brother Tom.

He paused in walking towards the door, asking himself if he should write a word to leave behind him—a message to her—to him—a testimony of the love in his heart? No, 'twould but add to their sorrow if they knew him for something better than an unfortunate man. The family Bible was in his hand: he might have left it open upon the table with the page turned down at this line: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Should he do so to tell how much he loved? No, 'twould be less painful to attribute his end to unfortunate carelessness than heroic design.

He went out of the Hall leaving no message; breathing only a prayer for the happiness of those who should live there after he was gone.

The wind had abated and the rain ceased to fall heavily; but over the dark grey sky black clouds hurried quickly, huge and formless. The terrace was clear, and the long drive could be seen for some yards before it was lost in the vapoury gloom.

Gerard walked round slowly by the shrubbery seeing no one, and coming to the stable he called "Jacob."

The stable lad answered readily, and having struck a light with the flint, quickly put a saddle on Tom's horse. Suddenly in passing Gerard he stopped:

"I ax your pardon, Sir," said he, "but I've gone and saddled the wrong mare; I thought you was Master Thomas by the coat."

"No matter, the mare will do. Lead her out."

The mare was led out, and Gerard sprang into the saddle.

"You can put the light out and go to sleep again, Jacob. Take this."

"Thankye, Sir, thankye kindly," said the lad, spitting on the crown Gerard had put in his hand. For him the day was beginning well.

Gerard walked his horse past the shrubbery and into the drive. It was growing light rapidly. After walking down the broad path a hundred yards, Gerard could discern the outlines of the two evergreen clumps standing by the path.

"All that heaven gives to happy mortals be theirs—my brother and his wife," he said to himself. "He will grow stout and florid, Tom; with a love for creature comforts and

healthy sports. Kind to his fellows, loving his children better than his life, and loving his wife dearer than all. An honest, healthy, English country gentleman. And she will reign like a queen in his house, beautiful and fair, making all love her by her simple fidelity and gentleness. God bless them! I have no other wish."

Paug-ker!

With the report came a flash of light from amidst the evergreens, and a bullet sped straight to the heart of Gerard. His last wish was uttered; his sorrows done; his end come.

The mare started forward, jerking the dead body from the saddle.

"There shall be no mistake this time," muttered Barnabas, throwing aside the used pistol and drawing another from his pocket as he scrambled through the evergreens.

With his arms spread out like a cross, Gerard lay, with his face upwards to the light. As Barnabas recognised his half-brother, his soul, callous as it was, shrunk within him.

His first idea was of the consequences. That the mob would not applaud as he looked down on the thousand faces from the scaffold—that they would drag him from the tumbril, and tear him limb from limb, was the thought that presented itself to his mind. Not a regret, nor the faintest tinge of remorse, touched him; only fear. And already he heard voices and approaching feet.

He looked round like a hunted brute, closed his eyes, and put the muzzle of his pistol slowly to his mouth; then, with his thumb, he pressed the trigger.

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THE END.

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